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A WILD GIRL; OR, LOVE'S GLAMOUR.

BY CORINNE CUSHMAN,

AUTHOR OF "MADCAP, THE LITTLE QUAKERESS," "THE WAR OF HEARTS," ETC., ETC.



"I DO LOOK SCRUM, THAT'S A FACT. NOW, ELIZA, UNLOCK THE DOOR VERY SOFTLY AND RECONNOITER."

A Wild Girl; OR, LOVE'S GLAMOUR.

BY CORINNE CUSHMAN,
AUTHOR OF "BLACK EYES AND BLUE," "PRETTY AND PROUD," "BRAVE BARBARA," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WILLFUL KITTY KANELL.

"THERE! glory! I wonder what papa will say to that! Ha! ha!" triumphantly.

Kitty Kanell stood sideways before the long pier-glass in her dressing-room, and turning her fair little head looked with great satisfaction at the image she saw reflected there. That image was clothed in a dark-blue silk with a string of pearls about the dazzling white neck. Kitty had always had plenty of silk dresses—the novelty of this one was the long train which swept back on the carpet giving her an air of young ladyhood which she had long sighed for, and now, for the first time, attained. Her father had given her money a week ago to buy herself a new dress for her sixteenth birthday; she had given orders to the dressmaker directly opposed to his wishes—since he had no idea of his wild young daughter coming out for a couple of years yet—and here she stood before the mirror triumphant in guilty joy.

Kitty's eyes were almost as dark a blue as her dress, and looked out from under their long lashes as bright and innocent as two woodland springs from their fringing grasses. Her light-brown hair was alive with flickering gleams of gold on every curve of its wavy masses. She had a little rosy, pouting mouth, pink cheeks, and a petite figure.

"It's just too becoming for anything! It makes me look four inches taller, doesn't it, Eliza?"

"Sure an' it does! Ye's awful swate in it, Miss Kitty; but, what'll yer fayther say?"

"I can't help what he says! Papa is an old fogey! He will believe I am nothing but a baby till I'm thirty, if I allow him to have his own way. I've been *dying* to get into trains for the last year. And now, Eliza, listen to me: I'm going to that party to-night, if he hangs me for it to-morrow! I shall pretend to go to bed early—by nine o'clock—and I shall come to my room and papa will go to his; he and Patrick will lock up the house; then you and I will slip down in our stocking-feet; you will open the basement door and lock it after us; we will put on our shoes in the area and then you will see me safe around the corner into the house of my dear friend, Lilia Bayard; then you can stay with her maid until I am ready to come home."

"I'll lose my place if Mr. Kanell hears of it, Miss Kitty. Sure, I was to kape an eye on you—that was my first dooty."

"And how can you 'kape an eye' on me, Eliza, unless you come along with me?—for I'm going, if I have to go alone."

"Indade, thin, I c'u'dn't permit that."

"Then it's settled. I'm bound to go. Pray, where is the harm? The Bayards are as nice as the Kanells; their house is only a block away, and Lilia's mother has *given* her the party. It's mean and cruel for papa to keep me shut up the way he does! He would like me to lead the life of a hermit. One would think I had to be caged, like a lunatic! I'm going to have lots and lots of fun this winter! I'm going out every night. I'll throw my Greek grammar in Miss Parseley's face; I'll burn up every Mental Philosophy they bring in this house! The *idea* of a young lady, with half a million in her own right, being kept at Greek and things, as if she was going to become a musty-fusty professor! It's all Miss Parseley's doings—she puts it into papa's head, so as to keep her position here; but I know enough, Eliza, and too much already! I can sing like Nilsson, and I'm not going to drum on the piano three hours a day. When people want to hear me sing, they must find somebody to play my accompaniments. I've made up my mind to have a gay time, and I'm bound to have it! So! you are to obey me, Eliza—do all you can to help me—and if you're a good girl you'll get your wages doubled out of my pocket money, and lots of perquisites in the way of cast-off ribbons and dresses. It will *pay* you to stick to my interests. I'm not going to live like a prisoner. We'll have jolly times, both of us. There! that's papa's latch-key in the door now. I wonder what he *will* say when I come down to dinner in this dress?"

Kitty, having come to an end of her speech

for the want of breath, took another long look at herself in the mirror, while Eliza stood mute with admiration, secretly preferring to yield obedience to this wild little chit, to following out the grave directions which Mr. Kanell had not failed to give her when she took the place.

Kitty was one of those children who deserve to be whipped and sent to bed ten times a day regularly. Not that she was bad or in any way wicked; but she certainly was the wildest little witch that ever a widowed father despaired of making a lady of. To a hasty judge, her naughty escapades often seemed to show a want of modesty; but Kitty's worst faults were vanity and irrepressible spirits, boiling and bubbling up in never-ending freaks of the wildest character.

At fifteen Kitty aspired to being considered a woman. Now that her sixteenth birthday had actually arrived, she was resolved that her longings for the gay life of a young lady should no longer be thwarted. Had she been blessed with a loving, sensible mother, her faults would soon have been overcome; but her mother had died years before.

Mr. Kanell was a stern, unbending, suspicious man, strong in his prejudices, with a dislike to society, and a disagreeable consciousness that his daughter would be a bright attraction to fortune-hunters when she grew up to be a young lady. That Kitty, at sixteen, was within ten years of that dangerous period, he would not admit. The few girlish escapades of hers which had come to his knowledge had caused him to lay down severe rules for her conduct in future, and had also induced him to give her companion and governess, Miss Parseley, such instructions, as made her really a spy and duenna. Consequently, Kitty hated her; and was driven to the servants for friends and *confidantes*.

From this it may be seen that neither the parent nor the governess understood how to manage Miss Kitty.

Kitty went down to dinner at six, that winter evening, with her little head "sunning over with curls" as brimful of mischief as ever a pretty head could be.

She looked so bewitchingly arch and lovely, as she whirled about before her father to show off her new dress, that, for a moment he could not scold. When dinner was half over, however, he said, in that cold voice from which Kitty knew no appeal:

"Miss Parseley, you will oblige me by seeing that the seamstress alters my daughter's dress. I want the superfluous length removed, so that it will swing clear of the floor about two inches."

"Superfluous length, dear papa! what a long name for train!" laughed Kitty.

"I remonstrated with Miss Kanell," said the governess, in that calm, superior tone of hers which always irritated Kitty, "about having her silk made in that manner; but she paid no regard to my advice."

"Never mind!" thought Kitty to herself. "The count is going to be at Lilia's to-night; Lilia told me so. He will see me in my new dress before they ruin it, spiteful old things! They say he is really a count—young, handsome, accomplished, intensely aristocratic and awfully rich. Lilia says he is very dark—all Italians are—and I adore dark men. Mrs. Bayard met him in Venice—attended one of his receptions—and knows all about him. He is no valet, or barber, or tenor singer in opera, like those adventurers we read about, but a genuine count belonging to one of the oldest families in Italy. Lilia raves about him. The party was made for him. Aha! my dear papa, chains cannot keep your little Kitty home to-night. If you only knew!"

But Mr. Kanell did *not* know. He was invited, and had sent his "regrets," as he always did, and thought no more about it. After dinner he went into the stiffly-elegant parlor, where he read the evening news until Kitty had sung him three or four songs, according to custom, when he shortly after remarked to her, as if she had been an infant of five years—"Tis nine o'clock—time for children to be in bed," and she kissed him formally and ran up-stairs to her room.

"Is it done?" she asked, breathlessly, as she burst into the handsome chamber, where Eliza sat sewing on some fleecy tissue white and light as thistledown.

"Not quite, Miss Kanell."

"I'll lock the door for fear Miss Parseley peeps. There she is now. Oh, yes, Miss Parseley, I'm going directly. Excuse my opening the door. I'm—I'm—partially undressed"—kicking off a slipper. "Good-night and sweet dreams! Hum! now we have things all to our-

selves. Let me look at it—oh, how awfully lovely it will be!

"Do you know, Eliza, there's going to be a real count where I am going to-night? Of course he is accustomed to seeing elegant toilets. Now, I've got my dear mother's jewel-case here—I got it out of papa's safe yesterday, when his back was turned a moment, the door being open—and I'm going to wear all the diamonds there are in it. Oh, Eliza! they are perfectly scrum! You never saw the like! Look! this is the necklace—and these are the bracelets—and this is an aigrette for the hair! They are all mine; mamma willed them to me, along with all her money, and she had oceans of it; so, if I choose to wear them, it's all right, isn't it?"

Eliza, dazzled by the diamonds, and by the flashing eyes of her young mistress, did not suggest the danger of going out on the street on foot with so much jewelry; nor did she know enough about the proprieties to warn Miss Kanell against appearing in diamonds at sixteen.

In a few moments, the illusion overdress was completed and donned. Then Kitty clasped the necklace about her fair neck—discarding the Roman pearls she had worn; the bracelets on her white, dimpled wrists; Eliza fastened the splendid ornament in her gold hair, and pinning on her breast some pink rose-buds from a bunch on her table, Kitty Kanell's toilet was satisfactorily completed.

"Oh, miss, you are *too* beautiful!" ejaculated the maid.

"I *do* look scrum, that's a fact. Now, Eliza, unlock the door *very* softly and reconnoiter."

In about three minutes the girl reported.

"A light in Miss Parseley's room, but your father's room is all dark under the door, an' the house is shut an' Patrick gone to the attic."

"I'll lock my door; then, if old fox comes she'll think I'm asleep. Now, 'come on, Mac-duff.'"

Mistress and maid went noiselessly down the velvet-clad stairs, through the hall, down to the basement, and out into the chilly area.

"The City Hall clock strikes ten. We're in very good time, Eliza. Oh, what a lovely lark we're having! I only hope papa will never find it out."

The house from which the two crept forth was one of the finest on a certain fine street on Brooklyn Heights. A chilly wind came whistling from over the bay; the stars glittered high up in the frosty sky; Kitty clung to her maid's stout arm, and they scudded along, turned a corner, and soon rung the bell of a brilliantly-lighted residence.

Ten minutes later Kitty, divested of her wraps, entered the crowded drawing-room alone. Any temporary embarrassment she may have felt was soon relieved, for Lily came quickly to her.

"So! you got away! I'm so glad. How lovely you look! Where in the world did all those diamonds come from?"

"My own, of course. Is the count here?"

"Yes. Look over to the left of the piano. That slender, dark, dignified gentleman. I'll manage to introduce you in a few moments. He's perfectly splendid!"

Very shortly after that, Kitty Kanell, blushing, glowing, blue eyes glittering with excitement, looking indescribably lovely, was presented to HER FATE, and cast one glance halishy, half-bold, into a pair of black, brilliant, inscrutable eyes which kindled with an expression of unmistakable interest at sight of her.

CHAPTER II.

SURREPTITIOUS BLISS.

Oh, where's the heart so wise
Could, unbewildered, meet those matchless eyes?
Quick, restless, strange, but exquisite withal,
Like those of angels just before their fall.

—TOM MOORE.

FLORIAN FENN was tired of life.

His engagement with Miss Bayard was off.

He and Lilia had quarreled.

This was a pity, since they seemed suited to each other, both families had agreed to the match and society had congratulated. Nobody knew for certain what they had quarreled about, but it was suspected to be the count.

Miss Bayard had met him in Newport, where she was visiting a friend through the month of September; he was on intimate visiting terms with the family, and she had become very friendly with him.

The Count Cicarini had been a wonderful favorite that summer, welcome at the most exclusive villas and cottages, petted by ladies married and unmarried. He was an elegant fellow, speaking deliciously bad English and

perfect French, who led the German as if to the manner born, and preserved, through all the gayeties of the fashionable season, an air of reserve, almost of sadness, which was irresistibly interesting, adding a last charm to his dark, romantic beauty. Lilia certainly did admire him warmly; but, that Florian was justified in being so madly jealous, that was another matter. She resented his suspicions and broke off the engagement.

After that, she did, indeed, flirt outrageously with the count, who came to New York the same week that she returned to her friends in Brooklyn, and who found time to cross the ferry three or four times a week to visit at her house.

The whole autumn had flitted away, Florian had not made up his quarrel with her, and now it was December, and she had given a brilliant reception in the count's honor, without so much as sending an invitation to her lover.

This reception was the one to which Kitty Kanell had stolen away, escorted by her maid.

Kitty and Lilia were very great friends, though Kitty was nearly three years the younger of the two. Lilia had not felt at liberty to invite Kitty to her party, although she wished her to come, knowing that Mr. Kanell would refuse permission; but the wild little creature scouted the proprieties, declaring that she was coming "if the heavens fell."

"You know, very well, Lilia, that I have not yet met your wonderful count, often as he visits you. Now, I shall be put off no longer. I shall be there!"

Perhaps Lilia, realizing the romance, the imprudence, the emotional nature of little Kitty, had purposely avoided bringing the two together.

If so, the mischief was done now.

Kitty Kanell, in her blue silk and fleecy illusion, her flashing jewels, her childish beauty, was smiling up in the dark face of the young count, her eyes a dazzling blue, her cheeks flushed, about her pretty mouth a gay, daring, mischievous smile, her whole face and figure breathing of the arch, willful, half-sweet, half-defiant nature which made her what she was—different from every other girl that ever lived or breathed.

Cicarini's curiosity was aroused at the sight of such a mere child coming in alone, as she had done, so richly dressed and so piquantly lovely.

If Lilia had cared deeply for the handsome foreigner she would have been as wretched as she had made poor Florian, for the count made no effort to conceal the impression made on his fancy or his curiosity by Miss Kanell.

Kitty had the bliss and triumph of two round dances with him. Ah! what a witching world this was! How glad she was she had come! What! be at home and asleep, when she could be here floating around and around to delicious music, amid lights and the perfumes of flowers, those dark eyes gazing gravely down into her own, that low voice speaking softly at her ear! No, no, no! Kitty could not sufficiently congratulate herself on having had the boldness to defy her father's wishes and steal away into this fairy scene. She danced like thistle-down, and the count enjoyed having her for a partner. He was making a study all the time, too, of her character.

It was easy for him, a man of the world, to see that Kitty had more enthusiasm than discretion, more spirit than prudence, more romantic notions than practical ideas. She was very, very charming, that was certain, and he almost told her so.

Somebody asked Kitty to sing. The dancing was suspended. Lilia played for her and she sang two songs, one from the opera of *Mignon*, and one a ballad.

If Cicarini had been surprised and interested before, he was doubly so now.

"Adalina Patti at sixteen never did better!" he muttered to himself. "She would make a dozen fortunes on the stage. But she is very rich, they tell me—very rich. She would have no motive for becoming the Queen of Opera. A mere child—a mere child! A marvelous child! She could not be better fitted to serve the purpose," but what purpose lurked in the stranger's thought, who can say?

Among the compliments showered upon her his were the most ardent and far the sweetest to Kitty's ear.

That whole brief, brilliant evening was to her what no other four hours of her life could ever be. The delight was new and perfect. Somehow—she could not explain to herself how—she was made to feel that she was beautiful and admired, while the triumph of being treated like a woman instead of a little girl, was, of itself, pure bliss.

The most commonplace things about her wore new and lovely colors, as if she looked at them through a prism. The count taking her out to supper, the ice Kitty ate was not like the ordinary mortal-made ices she had hitherto partaken of, but a confection of Paradise.

The moments of rapture given to us here are all the briefer from being intense. Kitty came out of her lovely dream with a shock when, half the guests already gone, she heard a silver-voiced clock strike one.

"Oh, I must go!" she whispered to Lilia, hurriedly. "I have to walk home, with only my maid for an escort."

"I am sorry, Kitty, but our coachman is ill in bed to-night. Shall I ask one of the gentlemen to see you safely home?"

"It is not necessary—only such a few steps, you know. Eliza is brave as a lion. Ah! I have had such a lovely time! I would not have missed it for the world! Poor papa! what would he say if he could see me? It is awfully jolly to be a young lady and have such a splendid time! Just think! sixteen to-day! So good of you to have your party on my birthday, Lilia!"

The count stood near, apparently absorbed in the study of an alabaster Psyche on a stand yet hearing every word of silly little Kitty's rhapsody. A sudden sparkle came into his deep eyes, but his lids were down so that no one observed it. The next moment, and before Miss Kanell had gotten ready to leave the rooms, he held out his hand to his young hostess, saying:

"I have had a charming evening—most delightful, but I must now say good-night. I have the ferry to cross, and it will be late before I reach my hotel. Please make my adieux to your parents, Miss Bayard, and I will steal quietly away," and with a profound bow and a glittering smile to Miss Kanell, he turned and glided through the silken crowd.

"The rooms grow dark," cried Kitty, with a mock-tragic sigh; "I'm willing to go now, Lilia. Good-by, sweet love. I'll run over in the morning to talk it all over."

She made her way to the dressing-room, where the faithful Eliza wrapped a warm cloak about her young mistress and conducted her down and out upon the street.

"I'm not a bit afraid, are you?" laughed Miss Kanell, glancing up and down the quiet, well-lighted street.

"Sure, we'll be home, miss, inside of two minutes," and so, by walking rapidly, they were; with only one little adventure on the way, too slight to be thought of again, after the little shriek which Kitty gave had died away.

As they hurriedly turned the gusty corner onto their own street they came in collision with a man, also almost running, with such violence, that Kitty fell. The pedestrian, without a word, quickly set her on her feet and went his way.

Kitty laughed over the ludicrous incident as soon as she was safe in the basement of her father's house, but, when she had crept noiselessly back to her chamber, and Eliza had lighted the gas, and she stood looking at her own beautiful image, all in a flutter of joy and gratified vanity, she suddenly gave a slight cry of dismay.

"What is it, my dear mistress?"

"Oh, Eliza, my necklace! my diamond necklace!"

"It was gone!"

"It must have come off when you fell," said the girl, beginning to tremble. "You stay here; I will run back and look for it. It will be there. No one will see it in the night."

Kitty waited a long time before Eliza returned, very downcast and forced to acknowledge that she had not been able to find the missing ornament.

"Papa will kill me," sobbed Kitty. "It was worth, oh, ever so much money—and it used to be mamma's."

So her night of rapture ended in tears. Stolen sweets almost always leave a bitter taste.

CHAPTER III.

GET THEE TO A NUNNERY—GO?

"If thou lovest me, darling,
In that is all said,
Why wait till life's roses,
The sweetest, are dead?
I call thee, I call thee!
When we two have fled,
What matters the tempest,
That breaks overhead?"

THREE times within the week succeeding the party Kitty Kanell met Cicarini in Miss Bayard's drawing room. The child was perfectly fascinated. She had no art or power to hide

from those searching eyes the feelings which made her own lids droop and cheeks flush and heart throb so quickly, so sweetly and wildly. Even Lilia saw what was going on, growing alarmed for the consequences to Kitty, since she was not at all assured that the count was a marrying man or that he returned Kitty's regard.

As for Kitty, she did not stop to question herself or him. All that she knew or cared was, to be in his company. She had a great trouble on her mind, but her happiness enabled her to put it aside much of the time. She was miserable when she thought about the lost necklace, because she had not yet summoned the courage to tell her father. She could not confess to him without betraying that she had been out at night in spite of his wishes and orders. Eliza would be blamed and dismissed, too; so the reckless child kept her lips shut, when, perhaps, by advertising his loss, Mr. Kanell might have recovered the diamonds.

The third time that Kitty met the count it so happened that, as she was singing a song for him in his own liquid Italian tongue, a servant called Miss Bayard from the room to go upstairs to her mother, who desired to consult her about some shopping to be done that morning.

Instantly, when they were alone together, the count—who had been turning the music for her—bent close to Kitty's velvet cheek and murmured in her ear:

"Darling, do you love me? Speak, quickly, before any one comes. You are the angel of my destiny!—never have I known what it was to be infatuated with a woman until your blue eyes smiled into mine. I love you—love you—want you to be my wife some day. Am I rash? Do my eyes deceive me, or are these blushes signs of assent?"

"You must take me to your father—must allow me to talk to him and tell him about myself, and beg from him the sweet privilege of your acquaintance, my lovely child, my star, my little rosebud! Look in my eyes, sweet one! Do you love me? One little whisper will make me happy. Ah! certainly, it was Fate which urged me to come to this beautiful country that I might here find the other half of my being, the charming child-woman who is to be my wife. Is it not so? Look up and whisper your answer, little rosebud."

Kitty's pure blue eyes, resplendent with rapture, shone up into his like two suns; her cheeks grew red as damask roses; there was no fear, no doubt, scarcely any timidity in her wild little heart, that never had submitted to the rules which guide ordinary mortals.

"So you really, really love me, and you a count?"

A flickering smile appeared and disappeared in the black eyes.

"If I were an emperor I should not be good enough for you, my angel."

"And you love me—so soon?"

"I adore you, little rosebud."

"So do I you," she said, simply, looking down.

He caught up one of her satin hands, white as the ivory keys it rested on, and pressed it to his lips.

"When may I call on your father—this evening?"

"Yes. I hope papa will like you," she added, wistfully.

"Is he very hard to please?" asked the count, in a singular voice.

"I am only a little girl, you know, or papa thinks so. I don't believe he will be satisfied to have any one make love to me for the next five years. Oh, Count Cicarini, do coax him and make him like you, for I shall die if he is cross to you. How strange! One little week ago I did not know you were in existence—at least, I had not met you—and now, now, you are a part of my very life!" she whispered, with startling earnestness; then blushing vividly, she added: "I am not like other girls. I know I am utterly wild and reckless; I do whatever comes into my head and say what I think; but I will try to improve—I will, indeed."

"I prefer you just as you are, sweet one," he said, gallantly; and then Lilia came back into the room, and wondered to behold Kitty, like one of those flowers that burst open all in an instant, looking so beautiful and glorified, that she was fain to stare at her in surprise.

Then a message came to brilliant Kitty that Eliza wanted her in the hall—Miss Parseley had sent for her to come home and finish her astronomy lesson immediately.

"Your lessons shall all be studied in the heaven of love after this," said Cicarini, in a low voice, as he accompanied her to the door. "I am coming to speak to Monsieur Kanell this evening."

It was a curious astronomy lesson which the governess heard that morning. She was obliged to give it up in despair and send Kitty in disgrace to her room; but the culprit did not appear at all distressed—she fairly sparkled.

Never were Kitty's eyes so dazzling, her cheeks so rosy, her indifference to a scolding so provoking.

By dinner-time she was pale and distraught, however, and had so poor an appetite that her father noticed it, wondering to see the color leap into her face as soon as he spoke to her.

After dinner, in the parlor, she turned as white as a lily when the bell rung and a card was brought in by Patrick.

"Who the deuce is the Count Cicarini?" exclaimed Mr. Kanell, sneeringly, when he had glanced at the card. "I have not the honor of an acquaintance with any count."

"Oh, papa, he is a friend of the Bayards—a real gentleman. Mr. Bayard met him in Italy. He asked permission to call upon you this evening—and I said—that he might. Do see him, papa!"

"Oh, certainly," said the father, turning away from his confused, trembling, guilty and yet happy daughter. "Ask him to come in, Patrick."

Then Kitty flew out into the library as the grave, calm, self-possessed, elegant stranger bowed at the drawing-room door.

Up to her room she rushed, buried her tingling face in the pillows of a lounge and lay there wishing her heart would stop beating so loudly in her ears—that she could hear what those two were saying—that she could know what the end would be.

"Oh, Eliza, Eliza," she panted, "would you believe it? Oh, this suspense is intolerable! Papa hates foreigners. Oh, please, please steal down to the keyhole of the door and come and tell me what papa said to him! Go this minute! I must know. This is awfully scrum—but, I wish it were over!"

Well, it was over soon enough.

The following morning Lilia Bayard received a note from her friend, per a ragged little boy, which read:

"DEAR LILIA, all is over. Papa is in a rage. Oh! he is so hard-hearted! He told my darling that I should never marry a foreigner—nor marry at all until I was many years older and wiser. He told him his money was never going to support an 'impetuous nobleman at the gambling-tables of Monaco.' Lily, I shall die! You know how rich the count is, and how gentlemanly—to have him insulted so. I tell you, we had a scene, papa and I! He knows about the lost necklace now, and I'm glad he does."

"Do you know what he is going to do with me? One would think these were the dark days of the Inquisition. He is going to send me to the Convent of the Sacred Heart—this very afternoon. Eliza is packing my trunk now—she is dismissed, poor girl, for aiding me to go to your party. I tell her when I am married to Count Cicarini—which I am determined on—she shall live with us. The Sisters are to have orders to treat me like a prisoner. I defy them all! The more they try to make me do what I don't want to do, the more I won't do it! I'm not to write to you, nor to anybody; I'm not to receive letters. Ha! ha! ha! we will see! I'm awfully miserable. But I mean to get some fun out of it. It will be perfectly splendid to circumvent them all."

"How about that sapphire ring you missed yesterday?—have you found it yet? I'm going to throw this note out of the window along with a quarter to induce some little beggar to carry it to you, because papa has given orders to the servants not to take out any letters of mine to mail; so please say to the count that I am true to him till death, and that my future residence will be the Convent of the Sacred Heart."

"Lilia, I have thought until my head aches, how to manage to correspond with you. Never mind, I'll manage it. You will hear from me soon again, if I have to buy out a stock of carrier-pigeons. In two years I will be my own mistress and have a mint of money of my own. However, I'm not going to wait two years. Do not be surprised if you see something in the papers some morning. I feel certain that I was 'born to greatness.' What a wretched thing it is to have a heart!—mine aches so. Tell him I am true as steel. Keep the other girls away from him, for mercy's sake! Your miserable KITTIE."

"P.S. Come right over and see me. The servants dare not refuse you admittance. I am certain that our two brains will evolve something equal to the gunpowder plot. Papa will think there is nitroglycerine around, somewhere."

CHAPTER IV.

AN ESCAPE.

Make no deep scrutiny
Into her mutiny,
Rash and undutiful.—HOOD.

"I am weary of grammar and rules."

FLORIAN FENN had a friend traveling in Europe to whom he wrote in October, after his quarrel with Lilia:

"You will be in Venice when this reaches you. Can you tell me anything about the Count Cicarini that will be reliable? There is a fellow here by that name, dark hair and eyes, olive complexion, speaks several languages, pays his bills, talks European politics and leads the German."

"We have so many adventurers here that I distrust him. The girls are making fools of themselves about him. He certainly seems to be a gentleman. Yet, I have observed things. He has an unquiet look about him. I saw him, at his hotel, turn pale when his letters were brought to him. Please inquire and report."

In November he had received an answer—the Count Cicarini was "all right"—belonged to the highest Venetian circles—had gone to the United States on a pleasure tour.

This assurance completely lulled Florian's suspicions; but it did not lessen his dislike to the count.

No, not even when, in December, he had a pretty little note from Lilia, informing him that Cicarini was "engaged" to Kitty Kanell, and asking him to call and see her. He and Lilia had "made up," but there was a sore spot in his heart, after all, for he could not help feeling that Lilia had only made overtures to him after she had lost the count.

"I wonder what a man like Cicarina sees to admire in that little wild friend of yours? I am afraid he is after her money," Florian remarked, as he and Lilia were discussing matters within a week after their reconciliation.

"How suspicious you are, Florian! I am sure Kitty is a perfect beauty, and has that sort of wild-rose charm that men of the world admire."

"What is he going to do about it? Sit down and wait for her until her father takes her out of the convent?"

Just then the door-bell rung, and a servant, coming to the door, said:

"There is a Sister from the Sacred Heart who desires to speak to Miss Bayard."

"Something has happened to Kitty, or she has done something dreadful," cried Lilia, rising to her feet. "Show the Sister in, Thomas," and the next moment a figure glided in, wearing the black dress and hood, the white muslin cap inside the hood, the cross and rosary, and stood with meekly-folded hands.

"Can Miss Bayard inform us of the whereabouts of Miss Kittie Kanell? She has escaped from the school. We are in great distress about her, for she has not returned to her father's and we fear that her wild, wicked and ungovernable nature has led her into irredeemable ruin," and the good Sister ended with a groan.

"She has not been here," answered Lilia, looking troubled.

"She is a wayward child," remarked the intruder, with another groan.

"Florian, can it be possible that Kitty has—"

"Run away with the count? No, but she expects to, if she is kept shut up in a nunnery much longer," cried a merry voice from under the Sister's hood, which was the next moment tossed on the floor, revealing Kitty's rosy, sparkling, lovely face.

"How did you get here, Kitty Kanell?"

"Borrowed Sister Agatha's things, and came. I'm not going back, either. It's awfully stupid in school. I could not endure it another day—there!" flinging herself into a chair and looking up defiantly.

"Oh, Kitty, you are a spoiled child. You must not expect that I can countenance such escapades."

"So! you've made up with Mr. Fenn!" was Kitty's rejoinder. "I always said you would. I'm glad of it. Mr. Fenn is one of my favorites. Look here, Lilia, darling, let me tell you something. Count Cicarini will be here in a few minutes."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I wrote him a note to let him know how I had escaped from the Inquisition and would be here. I paid a boy to carry it to his hotel, as I came through New York."

"Look here, Miss Kanell. As your true friend, let me ask you if you are not rash—are not going too far?" spoke up Florian, with a look of anxiety. "If the count is a gentleman of honor he will not ask you to do anything indiscreet. He will be displeased with you."

Kitty was silent a moment; then burst into tears.

"I could not live any longer without seeing him," she sobbed. "Besides, I had a letter from him—it came in a box of confectionery—in which he asked me to meet him at your house, as soon as I could manage it. He has to return to Italy very soon now, and he wants me—to marry him—before he goes. And I'm bound to do it!" added Kitty, her blue eyes flashing through her tears. "Don't look at me so won-

deringly. If I love him, how can I refuse him and let him go away without me? I cannot—I cannot! I am not a little girl any longer—I am a woman. I love him. I don't care for anything in the world—father, fortune, friends, without him! I am going with him."

"Kitty, Kitty, Kitty!" appealed Lilia. "I wash my hands of any responsibility. I am afraid you are too rash. You should at least let your father know your intentions."

Kitty did not hear her; she was listening to a footstep which she heard in the hall. Her hands were lightly clasped, her head inclined, her face a beam of intense, white rapture. They knew by her expression that her lover was coming before he entered the room.

Cicarini had a peculiar, quick way of glancing about a room when he entered it. His penetrating eyes now took in the whole apartment; he then advanced, with quiet grace, bowing to Mr. Fenn, and shaking hands with the two young ladies. Kitty's little white hand he retained, whispering something to her which brought the rich color into her young face, before pale with emotion.

"Is there no way," he asked, of Florian, "by which I may contract a legal marriage with Miss Kanell without the consent of her father? I cannot leave the country without her, and my stay has already been prolonged beyond my first intentions."

Before Fenn could reply the bell rung violently.

"Hide me!" cried Kitty, but that Lilia was not willing to do.

Mr. Kanell, black as a thunder-cloud, burst into the room, followed by the governess and two Sisters.

"Scoundrel! I have a mind to thrash you within an inch of your life!"

Cicarini flushed at the insult but controlled himself. Tapping his breast to signify that he was armed, he replied with calmness:

"You will not touch me, nor am I a scoundrel. I love your daughter—she returns my love. I went to you, as an honorable man should do, with a proposal for her hand. I offered her marriage, with a handsome settlement. I proposed to show you my credentials. You brought the interview to an abrupt termination—turned me out of your house, in fact. After this reception of my honorable proposal, I made up my mind to consult her and my mutual happiness rather than your prejudices. I tell you plainly, I intend to marry your daughter."

"A child—a mere child!" foamed Mr. Kanell.

"In our country the women marry at an earlier age. She suits me just as she is. Monsieur Kanell, I propose to you to settle this difference amicably. Let me have her, with your consent."

"Never! never! You are a foreigner—I distrust you. If my child had not a fortune in her own right, you would not be so warm in your pursuit."

"It is true that we look to the settlements—why not? Those who have wealth have a right to expect it. I would not marry a beggar—would you?"

Kitty looked in her father's face; she had often heard that he married her mother for money.

"It is none of your business what I would do, sir! My child is my own—under my legal guardianship for two years yet, thank Heaven! She is going back to school, and to the care of these good Sisters, which she so sadly needs. Kitty, put on your bonnet and return with the Sisters. Do not compel me to be still more severe with you."

"What will you do with me?" she asked, rebelliously.

"There are ways enough to bring you to your senses."

Kitty whispered to herself that she did not believe there was.

"Come, Monsieur Kanell, be reasonable! Let me make a proposition to you. Although inconvenient to me, I will wait here until after the New Year—say six weeks, giving you time to make all possible inquiries abroad as to my character and standing. If you find nothing amiss, you are to give me your word of honor to no longer oppose my marriage with your daughter."

Kitty glided up to her father, and twined her soft arms about his neck.

"Promise him—promise him, papa! You may as well, for I shall never marry any one but Count Cicarini. Never, never!"

"You are a foolish, wild girl," he said, but more gently.

"You are a dear, darling old papa!" she responded.

"Will you promise me to remain quietly at the convent, obey the Sisters, and not write to or speak with the count until the six weeks have expired?"

"Willingly—if he will wait for me," with a shy glance at her lover.

"Do you pledge me your word of honor to hold no communication with my daughter during that period?"

"I do."

"I then promise, provided I learn nothing to your discredit, to withdraw my objections to your suit."

"Ten thousand thanks!"

"I want no thanks. I am in no mood for compliments. Sister Mary and Sister Teresa, you wish to get back to the convent before midnight? My daughter is ready to return with you."

Kitty was obliged to resume the habit she had stolen, for she had no bonnet or cloak with her. She was in no very subdued mood as she kissed her father and Lilia good-by, said good-night to Mr. Fenn, and turned a lingering look upon the man who had so completely bewitched her girlish fancy.

The good Sisters took her off with them. It was a long ride back to the Sacred Heart, after they had walked to the Fulton ferry and crossed it; but the ladies kept silence; they would not reprove their wild charge in public; Kitty had plenty of time to think over the situation. Her heart beat with joy and triumph. True, her escapade had not ended as she expected—but six weeks would fly like the wind, and then—ah, then, love, bliss, a wedding outfit, a journey across the sea, a palace home, a coronet!

As if a gloomy old moldering palace in Venice could be half as delightful as that fair home of hers on sunny Brooklyn Heights! As if a coronet would not press too heavily on that childish brow! Kitty, Kitty, there are worse things in store for you than even these delusions!

But Kitty is reckless and inexperienced, willful and fanciful; she despises advice; she has a passionate nature; her silly heart swells with triumph; she laughs slyly at the grave Sisters; she scorns the convent walls as she re-enters them; her whole being is thrilling with delicious jubilation as she whispers over and over:

"Six little weeks!"

CHAPTER V.

WHO WAS SHE.

"The lovely Venetian was long since forgotten—The sweets of her lip and the warmth of her breast; Their gondola now on the water lies rotten, And she may be dead—so he hopes—and at rest."

"Did you say the Count Cicarini?" and into the large, soft, hopeless eyes leaped a wild light—into the ivory cheeks shot a sudden, hot flush.

To a certain large and fashionable boarding-house on the Heights had come, of late, a stranger who piqued the curiosity of the other occupants of the house. The lady was young, dressed in deep mourning, and alone, except for the attendance of her servant, a discreet woman of middle age, with but small command of the English language. Mistress and maid were Italians. The former went by the name of Madame Modena, and was understood to be a widow.

She must have submitted credentials of some sort to the keeper of this very aristocratic and expensive establishment, or she would not have been treated with such consideration.

If she had confided anything to the head of the house, her secret was kept for her, and no explanations made to the other boarders. It was enough for them that Mrs. Siddons showed her marked deference.

Madame Modena could not have been more than twenty. She had a slight, full figure and a pair of large, melancholy eyes set in a small, pale face. Her dusky hair was so heavy it seemed almost too much for the proud little head. If there had been a hint of color in the olive cheeks, or a single gleam of hope in the great black eyes, she would have been faultlessly beautiful.

With the exception of a large diamond worn as a guard to her wedding-ring she displayed no jewels; yet Mrs. Siddons knew that she had caskets full of them, for she had by accident obtained a glimpse of them. She took all of her meals in her room, and her only recreation appeared to be the long drive which she took every afternoon, even in the coldest days, though she shivered like some forlorn lily despite her warm sables.

Florian Fenn and his parents were boarders at the house. He was deeply impressed by the sweet foreign lady, who seemed so sad, and who, though reserved, received with lovely graciousness any courtesy extended to her.

He longed to constitute himself her knight-errant, feeling that she must often stand in need of manly service.

She liked him, too, for his frankness and kindness. Sometimes she would come into one of the reception-rooms, and talk with him a few moments in her low, sad voice.

On one of these occasions, very shortly after that evening at Miss Bayard's when he had been a witness to the scene between Kitty Kanell and her father, his thoughts being full of the count—whom he could not teach himself not to suspect of being other than he appeared—and recalling the fact that the lady was also an Italian, he spoke to her about him, rather abruptly asking her if she had ever known a Count Cicarini in her own country.

Then it was that, almost with a cry, she had echoed the name:

"Did you say the Count Cicarini?"

"Yes, Madame Modena. Being a gentleman of rank in your country, I surmised that you might have his acquaintance. I have an intense curiosity about him to gratify, which is my poor excuse for asking the question."

She stared at him with such a look of dread, of wonder, of horror, that he was put completely out of countenance.

"Why do you speak to me of him?" she whispered, at last.

"I beg your pardon, Madame Modena. I merely inferred that you might know him, and, if so, I wanted to ask you a few questions about him. Since I have made his acquaintance I have become anxious to learn more about him, on account of a friend of mine in whom I am interested."

"Made his acquaintance!" again echoed the lady, still in a hoarse whisper of dread and horror. "The count is dead—dead!" in an indescribable voice, shuddering from head to foot.

"Then this must be another count of the same name."

"He was the last of his race," she murmured, with wide eyes that seemed to see a specter.

"But I wrote to Venice and ascertained that he had actually left there to travel in this country, and that he was all he represented himself to be."

"He was to have left for a visit to the United States, but, the night before he was to have begun his travels, he was foully murdered," again with that long shudder.

"You must have been misinformed, madame. The Count Cicarini has been in this country several months. There is no doubt at all about it. I know him very well."

The lady stared at him as if he were a madman.

"How does he look—describe him," she spoke at last.

"He is young—not more than twenty-six; of medium height, slender, elegant, with a pale olive skin, deep-set, flashing, inscrutable black eyes, a dark, drooping mustache which hardly allows a fair study of his mouth—"

"Oh, my God! *Carlo is alive!*" burst from the lips of Madame Modena.

She sprang to her feet, stretched out her hands, and seemed about to fly in search of him. Tears started into her eyes, the first flush he had ever seen there came into her death-pale cheeks; she fairly throbbed with ardent life.

"Be composed," said Florian, gently. "Is he a relative of yours?"

She turned upon him a strange, glowing look. "He is a friend," she answered, simply. "I saw him stabbed before these eyes; I saw him fall—I believed him dead. Tell me where I can find him."

"He stops at some New York hotel; I declare I have forgotten which. He goes out in our society a great deal—you know, madame, we make much of titled foreigners!—and I confess to you now that I have been jealous of him. But that is all over. He is engaged to marry a very pretty girl—very rich and very young, too—but not *my* girl, so I forgive him."

Madame Modena sat down again on the sofa, from which she had arisen; the rosy fire faded out of her radiant face; she put her hand to her heart, looking up in his face piteously.

"Are you sure he is betrothed to this pretty young lady?"

"Very sure, indeed. I know all the circumstances of the engagement. They are to be married in six weeks. The lady's name is—" here Florian stopped short as he became aware that the lady had fainted quietly away.

He called Mrs. Siddons to the rescue.

"I think it must be the closeness of the air; it is very warm in here," for he wished to avoid

betraying the scene between madame and himself.

The lady was conveyed to her room. Florian lingered until informed that she was better, sent up word to ask if he could do anything for her, and, receiving a negative answer hurried away to keep an engagement with Lilia, saying to himself more decidedly than ever:

"There's a mystery about that man."

There were several ladies and gentlemen in the Bayards' parlors when Florian Fenn arrived. Mrs. Bayard was entertaining callers, Lilia was chatting with the count and some other young people. Cicarini's affair with the wild little school-girl shut up at the Sacred Heart was only known to the parties interested; and every young lady who came within the circle of his fascinations, and was not otherwise engaged, still did her best to become the envied one who should attract this foreign eligible.

Florian could not but study the count with even more than his usual suspicious regard. Yet he could find no great fault with him.

The only thing which really gave ground for the thought that he might be an impostor was a certain nervous watchfulness often showing through the high-bred quiet of the Italian's manner.

To-night Florian purposely tested this polite repose of which the Count Cicarini appeared to be master.

"I want you to watch him," he said to Lilia, in a low tone, after the first greetings had passed, "about five minutes from now when I engage him in conversation."

"What a suspicious creature you are!" retorted Miss Bayard, in the same cautious tone. "I am sure we have had quite sufficient confirmation of this foreigner's position in his own home. However, I will watch you both if you say so," laughing.

The count was chatting quietly with one of the peerless Brooklyn beauties who gave *eclat* to Lilia's "set." Fenn waited until the opportunity came and Miss Clafin's attention was drawn in another direction, then remarked to him:

"There has been an Italian boarding where we do for the last two or three weeks."

"Ah?"—the count's tone was indifference itself, but Florian imagined that he betrayed uneasiness.

"She is a most charming lady, who professes to be well acquainted—a friend of the Count Cicarini."

There was no mistaking the pallor which crept over the other's face at these words; it deepened and deepened until his features were actually livid. He stooped to pick up the handkerchief he had dropped, and by this ruse gained a moment's time in which to command his voice.

"A friend of mine? how delightful! Will you favor me with the lady's name?"

"Madame Modena."

"Madame Modena? Modena? Upon my word, I recall no such lady on the list of my acquaintance. However, it may come to me. I would not be rash about denying the friendship of a beautiful woman—you say she is beautiful?"

Some of his natural color had come back by this time.

"Very beautiful," answered Fenn, coldly, "and certainly a lady."

"I must do myself the honor of calling upon her. It may be that she has changed her name since we parted. Ladies do that frequently, you know. Is she married?"

"She is a widow, I believe."

"Of what age?"

"Twenty, perhaps."

"How interesting! Will you give me the address of your house?"

Florian gave him a card with the address.

"Did you notice any change in his countenance when I was speaking with him?" he queried of Lilia, later.

"He turned very white. I thought you must have insulted him."

"Nothing of the kind. I will tell you about it some day."

"He seems in good spirits at present. I never saw him so gay, or with such a color!"

"His gaiety is assumed," thought Florian, to himself.

The count was certainly very brilliant; there was a feeling of regret when he made his adieux very early.

"I have frightened him," again thought Fenn.

Florian himself went home earlier than usual. As he approached his boarding-house he became aware of a figure hurrying away which he recognized.

"He has been reconnoitering already," was the young gentleman's remark.

Going in and up to his own room, he found there a letter or two; and a paper from Boston sent to him by a young lady cousin who resided in that goodly town.

He read his letters, tore the wrapper from the newspaper and carelessly looked it over.

His cousin Elaine was a belle in one of the best social circles of the "hub," and he glanced at the "Society Intelligence," to see if he would find her name mentioned.

He did not notice Elaine Appleton's name; but he *did* remark this bit of fashionable gossip:

"Count Carlo Cicarini, of Venice, Italy, has arrived, and is visiting in the family of Nathan Bigelow. Several entertainments will be given immediately, in his honor. As the count is young and unmarried, our loveliest belles are pluming their feathers in anticipation of a conquest."

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

"You grow pale
To hear me say it, sweetest. Your fair face
Is like a lily in the wan moonshine,
And I do pity me and pity you."

"A visitor for Kitty Kanell."

It was reception day at the convent. Kitty's heart bounded at the announcement. It was dreadfully dull in the school that day, and the weather permitted very little exercise in the grounds. It was snowing so furiously that she had hardly expected any one to come to see her.

"It must be Lilia!" she cried to herself, starting off on the full run for the great bare parlors.

"Brush your hair and make yourself tidy, Miss Kanell—then, walk at a more moderate rate, please," said the gentle voice of Sister Agatha, and Kitty became aware, all at once, with a blush, that her gold curls had tumbled down in a race with another of the girls, and she had to retrace her steps to the lavatory and put them up.

"I'm spoken to as if I was about five years old," she pouted to herself. "Who would think I was engaged to be married to a count, the way they order me around? Never mind! *only four weeks more!* Dear Lil! you're a darling old girl to come to see me on such a day as this. I'll not forget it of you. Of course you will have a message from him. Oh, my! How my heart beats! Sister Agatha can't prevent that. I wish it *wouldn't* thump so when I'm doing my hair. My goodness, what a color it is giving me! There! I wonder if I'll do now?"

The blue eyes of the girl met the blue eyes of her image reflected in the glass blazing with the excitement of expectation. Her gold hair was twisted up and fastened high on top of her head, to make her taller; one or two glistening tendrils broke away and strayed down her dazzling neck, and plenty of little yellow rings curled about her pretty forehead. Her cheeks were pink as the inner hearts of roses; her face glowed with lovely eagerness; but she restrained her impatient little feet to the proper pace prescribed by the authorities, as she entered the large, almost empty room where *some one* sat by one of the windows awaiting her.

She saw that it was not Lilia.

A stranger dressed in black.

Kitty came near and dropped a graceful courtesy.

"Madame Modena, of Italy, wishes a little conversation with you," said Sister Agatha, and withdrew to the adjoining parlor.

It was evident that the Sister had a great respect for the visitor; Kitty saw that, and her wonder momentarily increased.

"I hope they are not going to make a nun of me!—not going to coax me into one of their horrid foreign convents!"

"Oh, I won't be a nun!—I can't be a nun!"

I am too fond of pleasure to ever be a nun!"

thought the silly child to herself, vaguely recalling legends of the past, and looking earnestly at the lady with her clear blue eyes.

The lady looked still more earnestly at her.

"How pale she is, how beautiful and sad!" thought Kitty.

"How radiant she is, how young and happy!" thought the foreigner.

"But such a child! a little school-girl! Can Carlo really love her after having loved me? Is she a mate for him?—for Carlo, who knows everything and has such serious thoughts? Can he have forgotten me for this eager child?"

She cast a proud look at the bright eyes questioning hers.

"I am a friend of Count Cicarini's," she began, in a low voice, speaking in French.

Kitty blushed and smiled.

"Then I am glad to see you, madame," in the same language.

"I was once a very warm friend of his."

Kitty suddenly noticed how very lovely the lady was and that she was still no more than a girl in age, twenty or twenty-two. She saw the pale olive skin which seems to bloom although so colorless, the thick, dusky hair, the long silky lashes—she felt the proud fire of those great black eyes. Without any good reason for it, Kitty began to tremble.

"We loved each other—loved each other, I tell you; but my father compelled me to marry a duke, a man as old as he was. Very well, we loved each other all the same. He braved danger and death, Count Carlo did, just to speak with me one moment alone. Do you believe he loves you like that?"

"I do not know," stammered Kitty, shivering.

"He came to this country to avoid compromising me by his affection. I was a married woman and he resigned me. Now, the duke is dead—he is dead, I tell you! I am a widow—free! free to marry again! Comprehend you? Carlo does not yet know this. I thought him dead until a day or two ago; we have not yet met. When I see him and tell him this, do you believe he will remember you? You are but a child—I am a woman. I love him. He should have been mine. Ah! you are a child—lovely, sweet, good—but you will easily forget him and love again. With me that could never be. You now know why I come to see you! Be generous. Give me back my lover!"

Kitty stood before her like one stunned. She made no reply.

The lady caught hold of her hands, covering them with kisses:

"Give me back my Carlo," she murmured.

"Never!" exclaimed Kitty, at last.

"Cruel—cruel! how strange for a child to be so cruel!"

"I am not a child!" cried Kitty, straightening her little figure and flashing back the stranger's proud look. "It *would* be a strange thing for me to give up the man who loves me, unless I was first given up by him. Give up my lover? You must think lovers are plenty over here, madame! Why, we are to be married in a little while! If your story is true, let Count Cicarini choose between us. It is for him to say which of us two he prefers. If it is you, very well! I wouldn't marry a king unless he gave me his whole, undivided heart, and mind and soul," declared Kitty, eyes shining, cheeks burning. "He wouldn't be more than half good enough for me, then, if I had every particle of him worth having," concluded the little American Queen, with a flash of defiance at the enemy. "Go to your Carlo, and bid him choose between us. I shall be content with his decision, whatever it may be. Tell him to never fear I shall break my heart over him," concluded Kitty, bravely trying to keep her lips from quivering, and the tears out of her eyes.

"You must forgive me, mademoiselle, for coming to you and telling you my story. I could not do otherwise than see you and tell you the truth. Since he is betrothed to you I shall not try to see him without your permission. I shall return to my own country, go into a convent, and die as soon as it pleases my God to take me out of this dreary world."

"I am sorry for you, madame. I am, indeed. It must be a horrible thing for you to give up the count. It would be to me. You shall not sacrifice yourself for me. You *must* see him—let him know that you are a widow, free to marry him. After that, if he chooses me, be sure I shall not give him up."

"You are an angel, mademoiselle! Too generous! Yes, I will see him, since you give your consent. Carlo cannot have forgotten me," she added, aloud, to herself.

"How came you to visit this country if you believed Count Cicarini to be dead?"

"I came here because it was here that Carlo was coming when my husband—when he was stabbed. My life was empty and time was a weariness. I sought to make the days pass less slowly. I imagined that Carlo's eyes saw what I saw—that he went with me in spirit: I seemed to dare to think more freely of him after I got out of Italy."

"You do love him!" thought Kitty, her expressive face softening into compassion.

"I will go," said Madame Modena, "to trouble you no more. I must see him. Do not blame me for that. Think how I have suffered! Agony that ought to have wrinkled heart and face. Do

not blame me that I seek to see him once—to put his love to the test."

"I do not blame you. As I say, if Count Cicarini loves you better than me, it is high time that I knew it."

The lady arose and held out her hand, which Kitty did not refuse.

"Let him write to me what his decision is," said the girl. "I send him word not to fear that he will break my heart!"

But when her strange visitor was gone, Kitty Kanell began to recall the love-vows the count had made to her—how often he had told her that she was his first real passion!

"If he has lied to me, I will let him know that I despise him! What a lovely, lovely lady!—a duchess at that! Kitty, Kitty Kanell, what are you, that you should stand any chance with that beautiful duchess? Oh, Kitty, I am afraid you have lost him! How miserable I am! What a dull, stormy day!—and I all alone, shut up in this prison without even Eliza's shoulder to cry on! I'm a poor, ill-treated girl!—shamefully ill-treated! I wish I had not promised papa not to run away. Ten to one but Lil is having all sorts of a scrub time! I'm going to go to bed with headache, and cry it out."

Before she had carried this resolution into effect Kitty was approached by one of the pupils, a chum of hers, who had been allowed to go with a friend to call on her parents in the city.

"Don't look at me, Kitty, or seem to care. Sister Mary has her eye on us. But I've got a note for you. I'll slip it into your pocket, and you can read it at your leisure. It's your count, I'm certain. Such a handsome fellow! He lifted his hat to me as I got off the car, and then he asked me if I knew Miss Kanell, and would I give her a letter, *very important*, and not let the Sisters know, and there was Sister Mary beside me all the time, and thought he was only giving me my shawl-strap, which I dropped on purpose. Weren't we cute? Oh, Kitty, I envy you! Such melancholy, magnificent eyes!"

Kitty's heart was in her throat. What was this note about? Had her lover met the duchess? He had promised her father not to write to her. She hid her agitation as well as she was able, until she could find a quiet corner, where she could read her letter without being observed.

When she found opportunity to open it, it said:

"Come to me, my darling. What is the promise I made your father, compared with the happiness of both our lives? I am sorry to break it, but—it was that, or lose my little angel forever. Kitty, I have no chance for explanations. All I can tell you is, that I have to leave for Europe *to-morrow*. I am in danger. What that danger is I will tell you when we are together. Is it too much to ask you to trust me in this? Do you love me?—then you trust me. I would go to your father, and tell him all; but he is one of those men destitute of sympathy. My little Kitty, my darling, must give me her whole heart, as I have given her mine. I pray to the good angels that she may never regret becoming the wife of the man who loves her. I will have the marriage license in readiness; all you will have to do is to deceive a little as to your age—to say that you are eighteen—and there will be no difficulty. I shall expect you to find your way out of the gates at five this afternoon—it will be dusk at that hour. I shall be near at hand ready to claim my own little angel forever and ever. If you love me, Kitty, you will not disappoint me."

In the snowy dusk of the early falling winter evening, a little figure wrapped in waterproof and hood made its way to one of the gates, turned the key—which was in the lock—and slipped through into the great, bleak world outside—left behind the peace, the security, the promises of her innocent young life, taking a fatal step forward into a future which ought to have filled her with awe and dread, but which, in her ignorance and infatuation, she went eagerly to meet.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DROMIOS.

Look on this picture, then on this.—SHAKESPEARE.

DUKE. One of these men is genius to the other;
And so of these: which is the natural man,
And which the spirit? Who deciphers them?

DRO. S. I, sir, am Dromio; command him away!
DRO. E. I, sir, am Dromio; pray, let me stay!

—IBID.

To Boston to see his cousin Elaine and to try to probe the mystery of the two counts, Florian Fenn resolved to go. He was prudent for one so young, taking his departure on the day following his meeting of the count at Lilia's, without other excuse to her or her parents than his desire to visit his relatives.

He took a deep interest in the welfare of Kitty Kanell, not only because she was Lilia's friend.

but on her own account. Kitty had a quality superior to her beauty, her high spirits or great expectations—and that was "charm," she charmed everybody.

Florian realized that it was time the discovery were made if there was anything in his disfavor to be discovered about the count. To Boston, therefore, he went, and received a warm welcome at his uncle's house.

"You have come just in time, cousin, to go out with me this evening. There is to be a very brilliant reception at one of my friends," said Elaine, after she had kissed him.

"Will I meet the Italian count, there?"

"Yes, he is one of the stars. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing—nothing at all—except what I saw in the paper you sent me. Perhaps you remember, Elaine, I never did 'freeze' to these foreign noblemen. Adventurers, after rich wives, most of them."

"You cannot say that about Count Cicarini. His credentials are undoubted. A perfect gentleman. Handsome, courtly, with a most dreamy and romantic air—I'm free to confess to you, cousin, that I'm more than half in love with him myself. All the girls just rave over him. He's perfectly del."

Florian certainly felt an intense curiosity to meet this delightful person. He hardly realized what a very nice dinner he sat through, nor how lovely his cousin Elaine looked as she floated down-stairs in a trailing rosy cloud of satin and lace.

"How abstracted you are, cousin Florian! It has just ruined your manners to become engaged. Quit dreaming about your Lilia and devote yourself to me if you please," pouted Elaine, in the carriage.

"I beg ten thousand pardons, my sweet cousin. I was not thinking, even of Lilia, but about some very important business. Is this the house?"

"Yes, this is the place. Look your handsomest, cousin, and do me credit."

In a few moments the cousins—a very handsome couple they made! were paying their respects to the host and hostess. Then Florian was introduced to a dozen pretty girls, but he could scarcely assume his accustomed air of graceful devotion, which he wore when in the presence of pretty women, his thoughts were so bent in another direction.

"Is the count here?" he whispered, as soon as he could edge around to his cousin's side again.

"He is just entering the room. There he is, speaking to our hostess."

"As soon as you can bring it about, I wish you would introduce me."

"I will bear it in mind."

Fenn's gaze continued riveted on the gentleman who had just arrived, to whom all his new friends were anxious to show attention. He might have been the New York Count Cicarini's double. He was about the same age, or a year or two older—had the same grave, deep eyes, olive skin, black mustache and slender figure.

Yet there was also a great difference between the two men. Florian liked this one even less than the other.

It was some time before a person of as small importance as young Fenn could claim any of the foreigner's attention.

In the latter part of the evening he contrived to be introduced.

"I have had the honor of knowing another Count Cicarini, who has been spending a few months in Newport, New York and Brooklyn. Is he a relative of yours?" asked Florian.

"Another Count Cicarini?"

The words were spoken as by a man in a dream.

"Yes, a Count Carlo Cicarini."

A mortal paleness overspread the dark beauty of the foreigner's face.

"Come with me into the recess," he said, as soon as he could speak, leading the way into the curtained nook of a bay-window. "Tell me more of this. The man is an impostor."

His own face was turned from the light, his hands trembled.

"An impostor?"

"He must be. I am the only heir of my name and race."

"He has deceived some of our best people, then. He is engaged to marry a young lady of wealth and position, in a few weeks. If he has been imposing upon her and others, the deception cannot be too quickly made known. To tell you the truth, count, I came here, seeing your name in the papers, to meet you and clear up this mystery, for the sake of the young lady, whose friend I am."

"Describe this person to me, please."

Florian did as he was requested, giving many

particulars of the other's career in New York. Before he had finished his companion burst into a violent laugh.

"Pardon me," he said, as soon as he could control himself—"it is an exquisite joke! I could not but laugh. It would seem as if my double outdid the original. It is too good! I know the fellow. The demoiselle he is to marry—you say she is very wealthy, young and beautiful?"

"All three; but a mere child—a girl of sixteen—too inexperienced to judge of a man's true character."

"We cannot talk in this crowded place. If you will be so kind as to do me a great favor, you will come to my hotel with me. I will excuse myself in about half an hour, if you are willing to exchange this brilliant drawing-room for an interview with me in my room. How will that be, Signor Fenn?"

"I am quite ready to go with you. I came to Boston to make your acquaintance, count. I will see if my cousin can be provided with another escort, and if so, will go with you at any time."

In another hour the two men were shut up in the count's sitting-room at the Tremont House.

When Florian got back to his own bedroom in his uncle's house, and began, deliberately, to think over the two hours' interview he had just come from, he was more bewildered than ever in his life. He had not been conscious of it while at the Tremont; yet, on reflection, he found that the count had gotten from him every particular as to his namesake's doings in New York, the name, residence and peculiarities of Miss Kitty Kanell, her father's business and home address, Kitty's banishment to the convent school, the address of the school, and a hundred other points; while he, Florian, had received no convincing proofs to make it apparent that this was the real count, the other the adventurer.

"He has completely hocus-pocused me, with his brilliant talk and his insinuating ways. However, I will see him again in the morning. It will be easy to settle this matter now. The impostor will, of course, flee—the real count stand his ground."

It was growing red in the east when Florian finally closed his eyes in sleep.

He came down to breakfast, nervous and not half rested; made little reply to the jesting of his cousin about the sudden friendship between him and the Italian, and went off to call on Cicarini as early as he thought he should be apt to find him up.

"I may tell you something, on my return from the Tremont, that will make you open those sleepy brown eyes very wide," he remarked to Elaine as he went off.

It was his own brown eyes which opened wide, however, when, on attempting to send up his card to the count, at his hotel, he was informed that the Count Cicarini had left very early that morning.

"Where for?"

"His baggage was checked to Philadelphia. We believe he is on his way to Washington."

"Was not his departure very abrupt?"

"We did not know, yesterday, of his intention to leave Boston. His rooms were engaged to the end of the month."

"Well!" said Florian, confidentially to himself, as he went out of the hotel and stood on the pavement, looking as if he had lost his way. "Well! it is more impossible than ever to tell t'other from which. I must make my apologies to aunt Appleton, hurry back to New York, and put the police on the track of both of them."

When Florian did reach his Brooklyn home, he was met with the information that Kitty Kanell had run away from school, and that it was inferred she had gone with Count Cicarini, as that nobleman had disappeared, bag and baggage, from his boarding-place on Fifth avenue.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRIDE'S FLIGHT.

"But where is she now, this night of joy?"

"Dainty maid of high degree,
What has the beggar to do with thee?
Thy life is morn, and love is May,
What has the beggar to thee to say?"

It was ten o'clock of the same evening on which Kitty Kanell had run away from the Sacred Heart.

In a small, plainly-furnished sitting-room on the second floor of one of those little old-fashioned wooden dwellings which still stand on Pineapple street, were a mother and son.

The latter had just come in from the street; snow clung to the threadbare overcoat which he removed as he entered.

"I am sorry you had to go out such a night, Philip. Did you find Mr. Kanell at home?"

"Yes, mother."

The tone of his voice made the lady look up quickly.

"What is the matter, Philip? Do not tell me that you have lost the situation!" speaking with evident alarm.

"No, mother, not so bad as that."

The young fellow began walking up and down the floor.

His mother watched him with evident uneasiness.

He was a magnificent-looking young man of two or three and twenty, handsome in form and manly in expression. The shabbiness of his well-brushed clothes could not detract from his beauty.

"Mother, mother!" he cried, after a few moments of restless tramping through the narrow limits of the room. "Why is it that some must feast to surfeiting on all the good things of life while others starve for a crust? Look at you, mother, a lady, once the ruler of a circle of your own—your fashionable friends have forgotten your existence; they do not remember your face when they meet you on the street. Look at me! I must bind all my fiery, eager desires within the meager boundaries of my thousand-a-year salary. Oh, if it had been different! Oh, if I had dared to 'put it to the test, to lose or win it all.' Mother, Kitty Kanell has run away from school with that foreign count, of whom I was telling you."

"Where did you hear that?"

"At her father's house. When I went there with the papers I found Mr. Kanell in a sad state of mind. A Sister had just been there to inform him of his daughter's disappearance and to place in his hand the note she had left pinned to her books, telling them 'not to bother to look for her—she should be a bride within an hour.'"

"She was always a wild thing. I am not surprised."

"She was a lovely, witching, wayward creature, mother."

"A harum-scarum, slangy, high-tempered little thing, Philip, if she was Dudley Kanell's daughter."

"Mother, do not say a word against her! I cannot bear it."

The lady looked at her son in mute surprise.

"I love her—I love her! I have loved her ever since the day I first set eyes upon her, when she was twelve and I eighteen. To me she is everything that is good, lovely, wonderful, charming. If I had been rich—if I had had the ghost of a chance—there is not a man on earth should have gotten her away from me. What was the use? A poor clerk in her father's bank—no friends—no prospects. All I could do was to long for her from afar. I do not suppose she is any more than barely aware of my existence, yet she has not been out of my thoughts one moment for years!"

"Philip, Philip! I am sorry for you."

"Oh, mother, she was so sweet! I would have died for one kiss given freely by her dear lips. There is no other girl in the world like Miss Kanell!"

"My poor, foolish boy!"

"She never spoke to me but three times. I knew, all the time, that I was mad—insane! I could not help it. You might as well have advised the sun not to shine as me not to love her. Do you remember the day she came here with the basket of peaches? You were ill—it was last July—and she happened to hear me telling her father about it, and came with the fruit that afternoon. I had come home early to take care of you. How shy and sweet and timid she was about it! I made her blush I looked at her so. Wild? yes, she was wild. I liked her the better for that. Oh, mother, my heart is breaking. Laugh, scoff, pity, as you will, mother, I tell you my heart will break."

He threw himself down in a chair, leaned his arms on the table, his head on his arms, and burst into deep, slow sobs. His pale, pretty mother—a hopeless invalid to whom this good son devoted himself as few sons would—cried silently as she heard and saw his grief.

It was the first she had ever dreamed that Philip had lifted his eyes to his employer's beautiful daughter.

He had enough to endure, poor boy, without that trouble.

The Armorys had once been as rich as the Kanells; but the father's ship had gone down in the faithless seas of speculation—he had gone down with his fortune—committed suicide—and

left his delicate wife and young son to do the best left to them after such a disaster.

Mrs. Armory sat silent and distressed for some little time. Then she made an effort to arouse Philip from his fit of despair.

"Why should Miss Kanell have run away to marry the count? Are there objections to his character? Did not her father approve?"

"I know none of the particulars. I was in the library speaking with him on business when the Sister came in hurriedly, and, in their agitation, they discussed the matter openly. I could not avoid hearing what was said. I know Mr. Kanell was very angry, for he swore a great oath—a thing I never heard him do before. He said that the count had broken his word of honor."

"I am sorry, indeed, if she has rushed into marriage with a man capable of that."

"Hark! mother. The bell rung, and now some one is coming up here to us. Perhaps Mr. Kanell wants me."

Philip started to his feet as he spoke. The next moment, a quick, low, nervous knock sounded on the door. Mrs. Kanell opened it, and there stood a shivering female figure, wrapped in a blue waterproof cloak and hood, whitened with the great flakes of moist snow which clung to it.

"Come in. Who is it?"

The unknown visitor stepped in, closing the door quickly, with a backward glance over her shoulder, as if she feared or expected pursuit, and turned the key in the lock.

Then she threw off her cloak, betraying the slim figure, the pretty brown head, the great blue eyes of Miss Kanell.

Kitty's face was white as the snow outside, her hair fell down about it in damp, ruffled masses, her blue eyes glittered with strange, feverish excitement.

Philip made no sound, standing staring at her as if a specter had arisen out of the floor to confront him.

Mrs. Armory, in extreme surprise, stood speechless.

"May I stay here to-night?" gasped Kitty, after a minute. "Oh, you must not refuse me, Mrs. Armory. This was the only place I could think of where I would not be looked for, yet where I would feel quite safe and protected."

"What has happened, Miss Kanell, that you come here?"

"Alas, madame, I am no longer Miss Kanell. I was married three hours ago, and I have run away from my husband."

Mrs. Armory looked her wonder at the panting fugitive.

"Of course you think it strange," ran on Kitty, wildly. "It is strange!—stranger to me than anybody else! I am a willful, wicked girl, I expect; and am punished for it already. It is my fate to run away," she added, bursting into hysterical laughter. "I had no sooner run away from the convent to get married than I ran away from the one I ran away with! Yet I am not crazy, Mrs. Armory! I am in my sober senses now—whatever I was before—and I tell you I would not have that man find me, to-night, for all the money my mother left me. If he should have been on my track—if he comes here for me—you must hide me from him. Promise me that you will hide me, if he comes for me," she pleaded, catching Mrs. Armory's hands and looking piteously into her face.

"Yes, yes, my poor child. Calm yourself. But why do you not go home to your father? He is your proper protector."

"I was afraid to go to papa. He is so dreadfully angry at me, you see. And then, that will be the first place where the count will look for me. He has the right to demand of papa to give me up. I am his wife. He will never, never let me go if he once gets hold of me; since it is my money he is after. Papa will say to me—'You married him against my advice—go with him!—go with him—I wash my hands of you.' Ah, let me stay here!" A blast of wind rattled at shutters and door, causing Kitty to give a low cry and cling to Mrs. Armory.

"You are nervous, my dear child. Compose yourself. You shall remain with me as long as you wish, and I will do all I can for your safety and comfort. Sit down here and let me make you a cup of tea."

"If you please," shivered Kitty, as her hostess drew her toward a comfortable rocking-chair.

Then, for the first time, as Mrs. Armory went about setting the tea to draw on the little stove which warmed the room, Kitty, settling back in the chair and glancing about, met the gaze of Philip Armory which had never left her face.

She blushed scarlet.

"I had forgotten about you," she said simply.

"Ay!" thought Philip, drearily, "I am no more to her than the floor beneath her feet."

Perhaps this consciousness angered him. He said to her, sternly:

"How dare you promise, before God, to love and honor a man, to be his wedded wife, and then, before the day is past, play him a trick like this? It seems to me strange fooling with the sacred things of life. I knew you were wild and willful, but I did not think you fickle and false."

"Philip!" exclaimed his mother, "is this a time to judge of her actions? Let us wait."

"Thank you, madame," said Kitty, with a new, indescribable dignity which made her lovelier than ever to the man who worshiped her very shadow yet had dared to find bitter fault with her. "I will be able, I hope, by morning, to explain myself, partially, at least. I have been foolish—headstrong. I deserve punishment. Perhaps your son's criticism on my conduct is none too severe. I shall be punished thoroughly—God knows that came soon enough! All my life I shall be punished for my folly. All my life—and I am only a very little more than sixteen."

Tears rushed into Philip's eyes as she uttered these last words in such a hopeless voice. He felt like a brute, as he furtively watched the pale little face leaning back wearily against the cushioned chair, with closed eyes and large drops falling from the long, curved lashes.

A great rage against the man who had made her unhappy took the place of the burning jealousy which had devoured him. He set his teeth together as he thought:

"If that dastard has injured her in any way I will have it out of him!"

Strange medley of human motives and feelings! A sense of happiness stole over the heart of Philip Armory as soon as he had imagined himself called on to take the place of this girl's protector. To be able to avenge any slight or wrong done to her would atone for all he had endured in knowing himself less to her than the dust under her feet.

During the sleepless night which followed, the young bank-clerk performed over and over, in imagination, the part of a hero, called to serve the woman he adores.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GARDEN TRAGEDY.

There comes a black gondola slowly
To the palace in festival there:
And the Count Rinaldo Rinaldi
Has mounted the black marble stair.

* * * * *
There rustles a robe of white satin:
There's a footstep falls light by the stair:
There rustles a robe of white satin:
There's a gleaming of soft golden hair,
And the lady, Irene Ricasoli,
Stands by the cypress tree there.

—OWEN MEREDITH.

COUNT CARLO CICARINI was one of the gayest young nobles in the dreamy and moldering "city of the sea," that gazes forever, like Narcissus, pensively at her own loveliness, mirrored in the mysterious water. It is still a city of passionate hearts, warm pulses, and strange romance. Not a foot of its faintly-glimmering canals but is thickly strewn with records of love and crime.

Count Cicarini was a bachelor, rich, light-hearted and happy—that is, he would have been happy if one episode of his gay life had not chilled and clouded those festive hours which followed after; but who still enjoyed keeping house, as unmarried men do who set up their own establishment. He rented, for a ridiculously low sum, nearly the whole of a gloomy old palace looking down on the Grand Canal. He brightened up some of the rooms with modern pictures, quaint china and costly rugs. He chose one of the great apartments for a dining-room, hanging it with marvelous old tapestries, and here, with accompaniments of lovely flowers and music, he delighted to entertain other gentlemen of similar tastes; nor was he exclusive in the choice of his guests. Artists were always his friends, particularly American artists; he loved their wit and originality. He would have a duke on one side of him whose title had come down from the twelfth century—on the other, a promising young poet, or a gifted painter.

The count was a great favorite with the grand ladies of Venice. No *fete* was complete if untoward accident kept Cicarini away. He was gay, but he was not dissipated; certainly, not dissolute. The death of his parents had given

him full liberty at an early age; yet, though extravagant, he was not a spendthrift.

Ever since he had come into the control of his property he had kept by him a young man of about his own age as his business agent. It would be difficult to exactly define Alberto's duties and position. When his employer traveled he acted as courier; he was not a valet, his duties were not menial, yet, in case of necessity, he would do anything that offered. He kept the accounts, managed the income, warned his master when he was going beyond it, was a friend and companion when they were alone, but never presumed beyond a servant's deference when others were present. Carlo confided all his affairs to him, both of the head and heart, consulted him about his list of guests and the *menu* for a supper, and poured into his discreet ear matters more delicate. Brothers could not have been more confidential than the count and his agent.

It came about, at last, after three or four years of pleasant trifling, dividing his time between Venice and some other cities, including Paris, that Count Cicarini fell desperately in love. His passion was a most unfortunate one, and to aid him in overcoming it, Alberto advised him to take a long tour. The count retorted, peevishly, that he was weary of traveling and had seen everything.

"But you have not been across the Atlantic. Why not go to the United States? That might amuse you, my lord."

And, after several weeks of persuasion, the young nobleman began to make preparations for a visit to that wild, foreign country—"the United States, in the city of New York," where so many talented artists came from; that is, he left Alberto to make the preparations, while he remained plunged in a gloom so deep and unyielding that Alberto really feared that something desperate might occur if he did not speedily go away.

It will not surprise those who know how such things are managed in Italy to be told that the lady with whom Carlo was so madly infatuated, was married. She was very young, very beautiful, and forced, by her family, into a political marriage with a duke fifty years of age, actively engaged in affairs of state.

Nor was Carlo so much to blame for falling in love with the duchess, since she had first allowed him to see that she was deeply interested in him. Yet he struggled manfully against the current which was bearing him to destruction. Feeling that such a course would make him utterly wretched, he yet consented to leave the place which had such a terrible charm for him, placing himself under Alberto's guidance. Firmly resolved to protect his own integrity and that of the unhappy girl who had been made the victim of family ambition, he even urged his agent to hasten his preparations for quitting Venice.

The letters of introduction we have previously referred to had been obtained, letters of credit made ready, passports prepared, baggage packed, and farewells spoken to many friends, when the count received a ticket of invitation to a ball and garden *fete* to be given by the duke the evening previous to Carlo's intended departure. His very soul was shaken by the temptation to accept the invitation, and thus have the wretched pleasure of again seeing and speaking to the duchess.

In vain Alberto pointed out to him the folly of yielding to this wish, begging him to remain at home nor incur the shock to his own peace, of again meeting the woman he hopelessly adored.

For once Carlo was obstinate, violent, would not hear to reason. He seemed to live only in a dream until the hour arrived when he dressed to go to the duke's ball. Then he became feverishly gay, and set out, in his gondola, in such extravagant spirits that Alberto felt very uneasy. He grew more and more restless as the hours passed. He was afraid his master would be guilty of some indiscretion which would draw down upon him the suspicion or the vengeance of the duke.

And now a few words about Alberto before we go on with the history of the night's adventures. His mother had been a handsome peasant who brought fruit to the Venetian markets; she was too ignorant even to know how to read; but her son early evinced a spirit and ambition quite out of keeping with his humble condition. The elder Count Cicarini had noticed his brightness and taken upon himself the expenses of the boy's education, whom he had placed with the monks, with an idea, probably, of having him choose the priesthood. At his patron's death Alberto had appealed to the young count to take

him into his employment, saying that he detested the idea of becoming a priest. Carlo took a fancy to the young fellow, and granted his prayer. Some close observers, of suspicious temper, had remarked a strong likeness between master and man, hinting that this accounted for the late count's interest in the poor boy; but Carlo had never heard these hints, nor had the idea they obscurely expressed ever come into his mind.

He had noticed, himself, that Alberto resembled him. Both were of slender, elegant build, dark-haired and dark-eyed. If Alberto knew, to a certainty, anything peculiar about his origin, he kept his knowledge to himself. In the monastery he had not only been taught many languages, but he had picked up some accomplishments—could sing exquisitely in a pure tenor voice, and play the piano.

That evening, after his master had foolishly yielded to the temptation to gaze into the dark eyes of Laura once more, Alberto felt a presentiment that evil would come of it. He was impelled by some inward power to go after the count, whose gondola not returning, Alberto went out and signaled another boatman.

The dark water of the Grand Canal was jeweled with fitful starlight as the gondolier pulled his boat easily along the path to the duke's palace.

Arrived at the marble stairs which led down into the water from the grand building where the ball was going on, Alberto did not know what next to do. Yet it was impressed upon him that he ought to do something.

Several gondolas were anchored near at hand, waiting to be summoned, for the hour had passed midnight. Long columns of golden light lay across the tremulous water, stretching from the illuminated windows. Delicious music, rising and falling with rhythmic beat, palpitated on the cool night air, while the shadows of stately men and jeweled women kept time in the dance as they fell athwart the windows.

Alberto knew that the garden behind the palace was also illuminated for the occasion, though a high stone wall guarded it jealously from the gaze of passers-by on the canal. He knew, also, that a side canal led past the garden, and that there was another flight of steps there, leading from a door in the side wall of the garden.

Something bid him to station himself there and wait. He spoke to the boatman in a low voice, who turned his gondola into the cross-canal and moored it at the other landing.

There all was darkness and gloom. There were few or no windows on that side of the palace; a faint light from the illumination within streamed over the high wall, but the water itself looked black, except where the stars sparkled on some ripples.

There was music in the garden, too; sweet laughter, or a fine voice singing, occasionally reached the alert ear of the watcher. The gondolier fell sound asleep. Alberto stepped lightly from the boat, went up the steps and opened the door in the wall. He thought if he saw the count in the garden, he would let him know his gondola waited there. His heart throbbed heavily with unaccountable excitement.

All had been silence for the last half-hour in the garden. The guests were evidently departing. When Alberto peeped in he saw no one. He opened the door a little wider and slipped into a dim alley, bordered with thick foliage of flowering shrubs. The colored lamps were many of them burning low—the music had ceased.

He strayed on until he found himself in a lovely nook, some distance from the palace. A marble statue of Psyche gleamed whitely under thick drooping trees, of a green that was almost black.

A fountain played in the center of a green plat. The falling water plashed softly into a marble basin. By this basin stood two persons. The light was very dim in this secluded place, but Alberto knew, in a moment, who the pair was, standing there together, looking despairingly at one another. They did not speak or move. They only looked at each other with passion and misery in their bright eyes. The lady's white satin dress made her appear like one of the statues placed about. The diamonds in her gold hair glittered like fire-flies. The sweet face was white as death.

"Laura," murmured the count, "farewell."

It was all he said. He did not even attempt to touch the hand she half held out to him.

Then Alberto saw what the hapless lovers did not see, gave a cry of warning, and sprang to save his master. He was too late. The poniard of the jealous duke had pierced the count's back, who fell face forward without a moan or struggle.

The duchess remained spellbound with horror. The duke, in his rage, did not even perceive there was a witness to his deed. He caught up the body of his rival, dragged it by the shoulders along the alley of orange-flowers and roses until he came to the door in the wall; then, without pausing to rest, inspired by fury with a giant's strength, he jerked the count through, and, the next instant, Alberto, paralyzed with the shock, heard the dull splash in the canal which told what had been done to hide the sudden crime from human eyes.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNT'S DOUBLE.

OTHELLO. Honest, honest Iago!

IAGO. As the time, the place and the country stands I could heartily wish this had not befallen; but, since it is as it is, mend it for your own good.

—SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN Alberto, the night of the *fete*, had seen his master assassinated before his eyes, he had shrunk behind some laurels, for fear, if he was discovered, he would share the same doom. It was not three minutes before the duke returned, his features set in a stern composure, and placing his hand on the shoulder of his motionless wife, hissed something into her ear, and pushed her before him on toward the palace until the two disappeared together. Then Alberto ran to the gate, opened it, and slipped through. All was dark and silent. The boatman had not even awakened; he was snoring on his seat.

Alberto stood a moment, lost in thought. He could not endure the idea of leaving his master's body in the water; but, after all, the count was dead from a stab in the back, and what good could it possibly do *him* to be fished up like an old boot or a string of sea-weed?

It would ruin the duchess, that was all.

A half-formed idea came into the agent's mind.

Stepping into the gondola he aroused the gondolier, said to him that the count must have gone home with some of his friends, and directed him to return to their apartments.

Once home, Alberto lighted a couple of lamps in his master's bed-chamber, and sat down in a chair. He felt very ill. The sight of the luggage all strapped for the journey affected him strangely.

The sleepy valet stumbled up to him wanting to know if the count had come.

The man-of-business aroused himself from a deep reverie; the answer which came to his tongue, almost without his desire, decided for him a course which had only presented itself to his mind fifteen minutes before.

"The count," he answered, "has gone on to Paris to-night. He found that he could travel with a party of friends, and liked the idea. I am to go in the morning with the luggage. You, Francois, are to remain behind. The count has concluded that he will take no valet to the United States; but, that you may lose nothing, he directs me to pay your wages for two months and give you a good recommendation. You will have a place long before the end of the two months. So, do not grumble. Sleep here to-night, that you may help me about getting off in the morning."

The remainder of that night was like an eternity to Alberto; and still daylight came all too soon. He spent it in pacing the floor, perfecting in his own mind all the particulars of the dangerous imposture he was about to attempt.

A fellow of little principle, always restless and ambitious, Fate had thrown in his way an irresistible temptation.

Who need know that the young Count Cicarini lay at the bottom of the canal at the foot of the duke's garden? The duke himself would be the last to betray the murder. Even if he should learn that some one was playing the part of the count in another country, his own safety would demand that he keep silence.

Alberto had quite a large sum of money in his possession, for the count had handed him his purse and account-book before going out that evening. He knew more than the owner about the affairs of the Cicarini estate. He could continue to draw the income in the count's name, to invent excuses for the count's long delay in returning home. He resembled his master in general personal appearance. He was familiar with the family history. He could go into details about its affairs.

He was acquainted with the names of its ancestry. The count had no near relatives to concern themselves particularly about his whereabouts. It would be easy to adopt the name and title of the murdered man and to continue to personate him for years.

The only serious danger would be the liability

of encountering some personal friend of Cicarini's. Even this danger he hoped to avoid by keeping himself in the United States. After two or three years, if he escaped detection that long, he would deny the recognition of any one. The more he went into the details of the plan the more confidence he felt.

Alberto spent some time securing the family papers of his murdered employer, his seal, his writing-desk, a hundred small articles belonging to the personal property of the count.

By morning he had an important box added to the other baggage.

He got away from Venice early. He avoided Paris, for the count had many friends there. On reaching London, in the character of the count, he telegraphed Francois to know if all were well in Venice—he desired to hear before he sailed. He knew that if Francois answered that all was well, it would relieve his mind of the fear that the count's body might have been discovered. Francois did so answer.

"Let the body remain a few days in the water and it will be unrecognizable," was his thought.

To the passenger-list of the steamer he first forged the name of the Count Cicarini. His hand shook; but, in time, it learned to do the bidding of its master without trembling. There was no one on board who had the slightest previous acquaintance with the nobleman.

Arrived in New York the adventurer again telegraphed. He was anxious to avoid a false step. He would not take up his part in this strange city until he had ascertained what the news might be.

His baggage remained on shipboard, nor would he register at any hotel until the answer arrived. It was to the effect that all was well, and Alberto took courage to go on with the course he had adopted.

CHAPTER XI.

FOR HER SAKE.

JULIET. Oh honey nurse, what news?—SHAKESPEARE.

"Doomed to see another take

All I longed for and desired."—BULWER.

A STRANGE week for Philip Armory followed on the advent of Kitty. She remained with his mother a week. What that week was to him none but himself can describe. So brief, so endless, so happy, so wretched—full of contradictions.

When he came back at evening from his day's duties, it sent the warm blood in swift pulses through his frame to think whose face he should see when he entered those humble chambers. Yet it was misery to know that beautiful face would never shine the "bright, particular star" of his life.

Kitty was very silent and pale during that interval. She had something of her father's reticence, impulsive though she was, for she could not bring herself to confide to Mrs. Armory the secret of her singular behavior.

"I had scarcely more than spoken the words which made me his wife than I discovered something which suddenly betrayed to me that he was not the man I had taken him to be—something which caused an utter revulsion of feeling"—was all the explanation she gave.

There was something so lovable about Kitty—and now, added to that, something so pitiable—that Mrs. Armory's heart was completely won before the first twenty-four hours were passed. Still, she regretted the girl's being in her house, knowing the state of Philip's mind. It was unfortunate that he should have this intimate association with one it was the business of his life to forget.

His mother watched him anxiously whenever he spoke to Kitty. Poor little thing! not even the dreadful lesson which she had left her school-books to learn from the sterner book of life, could quite crush the brilliancy of her young spirits. As they sat at their modest tea-table, or gathered around the lamp afterward, some of her old trickish ways would flash out upon them; she would be her own bright self for a few minutes. She had only the simple blue merino school-dress to wear in which she had left the convent. To see her in that, so quiet and pretty, her glorious hair put plainly back, yet breaking out in a hundred insurrectionary curls about her sweet face; wearing the little apron Mrs. Armory had lent her, determined to help about washing up the tea-things, not knowing in the least how to go about it; Philip felt as if he were in a dream.

This could not be the heroine of the week, the story of whose adventures, as far as known, filled every newspaper of New York and Brooklyn.

This could not be the Countess Cicarini!

Well, perhaps Kitty was not a countess, after all.

He brought home, at her request, many of these papers, in which Kitty read all that was known of her story; read, with burning blushes of shame, the free comments on her conduct; read, with breathless interest, accounts of the proceedings of the court.

"It was certain," the papers said, "that the bride had not returned to her father's house. Mr. Kanell knew nothing whatever about his daughter. He was very angry with her—would have nothing to do with the matter. Lost or found, it would make no difference to him. He 'disowned' her from this time; she was no longer a child of his."

Over such paragraphs the runaway shed many tears.

"The count took his loss very composedly, yet seemed determined to find his bride. He had detectives employed searching in every direction. No doubt the missing lady would be discovered very soon. That is, if she were alive. There were fears that she had, in a sudden paroxysm of remorse at disobeying her father, thrown herself into the river. Count Cicarini thought it quite possible this might be so. If alive, he hoped his wife would return to him and put an end to suspense of friends."

Paragraphs like these made Kitty turn pale.

Very anxiously she inquired, day after day, when Philip returned from the bank, how her father appeared, what he said?

The reply was always the same:

"He is haughtier and more silent than ever. I do not think even his partners would dare question him on the subject. He looks rather sterner than before, that is all; he seems well."

Then she would thank Mr. Armory, and turn away to hide her tears.

After a few days she set him to hunting up Eliza, her discharged maid. Philip had no trouble to find her, since Kitty knew the address of the new place she had taken; but he did not dare be seen in communication with her, so dropped her a letter, feigning the untutored penmanship of an illiterate person, asking her to "call at No. — Pineapple street, after eight in the evening, to meet an old friend."

"Faix, I knew it was you, my darlint, the minute my eyes lit onto the paper," cried Eliza, that night, as she was mysteriously conducted up to Mrs. Armory's rooms, where Kitty rushed at her, and sobbed on her shoulder.

"You said nothing to others, Eliza?"

"Thrust me for that! I was silent as me grandmother's grave. Ah, Miss Kitty, an' why did ye run away from him after ye'd got him? I'm that bothered to know! I don't understand it, at all, at all. Yer a quare young lady, my dear."

"Eliza, I didn't send for you to scold me. I thought perhaps you would know I did it for the best, and would be sorry for me."

"There, there, my honey, don't cry, or yez'll break my heart. Ov coorse I know ye did it for the best, only ye are such a wild little thing, so young and motherless, ye might make a mistake an' be none so much to blame. Och, but I'm sorry, I am, that ye coaxed me to take ye to the party that night."

"So am I, Eliza."

"It's no use crying for the spilt milk, me darlint. What can I do for ye, now?"

"I want you to pay a visit to my father's servants. They will tell you how he is—if he is well—if he is *very* angry. Oh, Eliza, I would like to go back to my dear home if I dared! I was a wicked, ungrateful girl, to do as I did. Find out how papa feels to me, and come here to-morrow night and tell me all about it. And, oh, Eliza, go and see Miss Bayard. Do not breathe to her that you have seen me; but go and inquire if she has heard from me and learn all you can that you think I would like to know."

"Sure an' I will, Miss Kitty. Lord love us, only to think of it! you're a countess now, aren't you, me pretty?"

"No," answered Kitty, looking down.

Eliza seemed disappointed.

"Sure, an' the papers calls ye that," she declared.

"Never mind. Don't disappoint me to-morrow, Eliza. The day will be awfully, awfully long, waiting for you."

"I'll be here, if I have to throw up my situation an' quarrel wid the mistress to get leave to come out. Sure, Miss Kitty, now I look at yez ag'in, ye's grown that thin an' pale as I wouldn't belave in a single wake."

Kitty's lips quivered, but she made no complaint. The two talked a few moments longer, and then Eliza went away.

Faithful to her promise Eliza returned the following evening, with a graphic report of her

two visits. The servants at Mr. Kanell's were in such awe of their master's mood they dared not speak poor Kitty's name aloud, with him sitting overhead in the library.

Miss Parseley was in high spirits. Pretending to regret the conduct of her pupil, it was the opinion of Mrs. Kelley, the cook, that the sly thing was taking advantage of Mr. Kanell's being out of sorts, to wile him along to marry her.

"Oh, poor, dear papa, why *did* I leave him?" cried Kitty, at this part of the news. "I never will go home with that snake-in-the-grass for a stepmother!"

Eliza had seen Miss Bayard, who cried when she spoke of her friend, and said it was her belief the poor child was at the bottom of the river. Mr. Fenn was with Miss Bayard, and he was afraid of it, too; they had no clew to her conduct, unless she had become frightened at the step she had taken and drowned herself.

Philip Armory perceived, with the quickness of love, that their visitor was in lower spirits, after Eliza's second visit, than she had been at any time since coming to their house. No wonder that she felt deserted by the whole world, with her father irreparably offended, her friends believing her dead; nowhere to turn—nothing to do, but keep quiet and suffer!

Such a punishment as this was the severest that could be inflicted on a temperament like Kitty's. She could face an enemy—laugh at danger—scorn the proprieties. But, to sit still, in helpless submission—that was hard!

He was studying her downcast face—as he did every moment when he could do so unobserved by her—when the girl suddenly lifted her blue eyes and looked straight into his heart. Philip dropped his lids as soon as possible, but his passionate longing had been in his eyes, and she had seen, and, for the first time, understood it. She blushed painfully. There was a long silence in the room. Mrs. Armory was busy with her sewing, near the table; Philip did not dare look at Kitty again; she was thinking new and painful thoughts.

Doomed to be the creature of impulse, Kitty was not more than half an hour in coming to a decision.

Rising and going over to the kind lady who had sheltered her, she sat down in her lap, gently taking away the sewing.

"Look at me, Mrs. Armory," she began, the color flying into her face, her eyes shining. "Listen to me and advise me, just as if I were your own daughter. I have thought it all over, and have made up my mind that it is my duty to go to my husband."

Philip uttered a cry of surprise. She did not seem to hear it.

"As you have not told me why you left him, I cannot advise you," was Mrs. Armory's grave reply, after her first feeling of wonder.

"If I live with him, I will never tell any one the reason. I will bury my knowledge of his fault in my own breast. He is not as good a man as he ought to be—perhaps, if I live with him, and try to make him better, he will be sorry for the past."

"Never marry a man to reform him, my dear child."

"But, I *am* married to him; it is too late to alter that. As your son said to me when I came here—'How dare you promise, before God, to love and honor a man, and then desert him? It seems to me strange fooling with the sacred things of life!' Ah, Mrs. Armory, I have thought that over and over. I swore to be his 'for better or worse'—it is *worse*, but, I am bound, all the same. In the first shock of the discovery I made it seemed to me *wrong* and impossible to live with him. Now, I look upon it differently."

"Do you love this man you have married?" It was Philip, not his mother, who asked this question.

"I do," said Kitty, in a low, intense voice, as if she were again responding to the sacraments. "Whatever he is, I love him. It is because I love him that I suffer so in keeping away from him."

Philip sighed deeply. Mrs. Armory could say nothing to the poor child who clung about her neck, looking to her for advice.

In her eyes, it was a fearful thing for this child of sixteen to link her fate with that of a man she did not trust—probably a bad man, who would slowly crush her spirits and break her heart by a life of dissipation—for Mrs. Armory could think of nothing but that Kitty had discovered her noble count to be a person of dissolute habits. Philip had told her of the high position the Italian held at home and in New York, and she could imagine only that perhaps

he was somewhat "fast," and Kitty had been shocked by some sudden knowledge of it.

"I cannot, my dear child, give you any advice. I feel as anxious for your happiness as if you were my own daughter; but this is a matter—now that it has gone so far—which you must decide for yourself. I only wish that you had waited until you were older, before taking the one step of most importance in your whole life."

"God knows I wish it, too. But, it is too late—too late! He is my husband—my father casts me off—there is nothing to do but accept my fate as I have myself fashioned it."

"There is one thing you can do," spoke up Philip, hoarsely. "Go to your father first. He may take you home and afford you his protection. He is the proper person to advise you how to act."

"I am afraid of him. But I will go, if *you* bid me, Mrs. Armory."

"It seems to me best that you should."

"Will you come with me, both of you? Let us go, now—to night."

In a few moments they were ready, and soon Philip was ringing the bell at Mr. Kanell's door. Patrick gave a cry as he caught sight of the pale little face inside of the blue hood. He would have closed the door but Philip put his shoulder against it, bidding his mother and her trembling companion to pass in.

There was light showing through the half-opened door of the library. Kitty went directly toward it, followed by Mrs. Armory; Philip remained in the hall.

A strange feeling of love and sorrow pierced Kitty's heart like a knife as she pushed the door wide open and saw her father sitting by the table, looking gray and worn, his head drooped in his hand.

"Papa!" she cried; "dear papa! Here I am. May I come in? May I come back to you, *dear* papa?"

Mr. Kanell rose to his feet and folded his arms across his breast.

"No, you cannot come back. You have disobeyed me, broken your promise, brought a shameful publicity upon yourself and me. I want nothing more to do with you. You were always a willful piece—like your mother. Patrick had orders not to admit you. Go out of this house! Never darken my doors again."

A moment before Mr. Kanell had not known whether his only child was alive or dead; yet, seeing her there before him, pale, young, helpless, appealing to him, he drove her out of his presence.

He was a very proud man, and she had offended his pride, by the notoriety she had brought on herself. He was one who did not readily forgive injuries. Indeed, he had never forgiven poor Kitty that she was not a boy who would carry down the family name, any more than he had forgiven her unloved mother for not bearing him a son, and for willing her great fortune to her daughter instead of leaving it solely under his control.

"You do not really mean to turn the child away!"

"And who are you, madame?" turning on Mrs. Armory with withering scorn. "I regard your presence here as an intrusion. Patrick, show these persons out."

Mr. Kanell turned his back and re-seated himself at the table. Choking with grief and indignation Kitty tried to speak again, but could not, and bravely keeping back her sobs, she seized Mrs. Armory by the hand and drew her away.

"You are a stony-hearted savage, and you will be sorry for this some day."

Mr. Kanell looked around in some surprise as he heard these words thrown at him from the hall.

"Ah, Philip, is that you? Your interference costs you your place. You need not come to the bank again."

"Take me to Lilia's, please," said Kitty, as the three went out into the starry night. "I will stay with her to-night. There is no longer need of concealment, since I am going to my husband in the morning. It is only a little way from here. Mr. Armory, I am sorry you have lost your place for my sake. It shall be made good to you. I have money of my own which I can use, some time. Mrs. Armory, I shall love you forever. Here we are! Come in with me, do, if you please."

"I shall wish to see you safe, my dear," answered the elder lady, and so she and her son followed on into the house up whose steps they had passed.

Lilia Bayard started up with a scream of delight as a pale, tear-stained little face appeared at the drawing-room door.

But Kitty did not hear it—did not see her! There was a graceful figure standing by the piano, at sight of which a rich bloom leaped into her white cheeks, a great splendor dawned in her dazzled eyes: with outstretched arms she flew across the room and threw herself upon the count's bosom.

"Oh, Carlo, I have come back! I will never play you such a trick again," she sobbed; "I am your loving little wife, Carlo."

That was the scene Philip Armory carried back with him, as he walked slowly home with his mother to the poor rooms grown dull and dreary, and remembered that he was dismissed from his place in mid-winter—"for her sake."

CHAPTER XII.

A MYSTERY WITHIN A MYSTERY.

Well, and if none of these good things came,
What did the failure prove?
The man was my whole world, all the same,
With his flowers to praise, or his weeds to blame,
And either, or both, to love.

—BROWNING.

LET us go back to that snowy twilight when Kitty Kanell slipped through the convent-gate into the arms of her lover, waiting for her outside.

"Dearest angel!" whispered the soft, broken Italian voice, "here is the carriage, let us hasten to the good clergyman whom I have engaged. Once mine, father or friends will try in vain to part us."

He placed the trembling girl in the close carriage, took his place by her side, and the driver whipped up his team, making good speed toward the address given him.

Not many words did the pair speak on the short drive. Kitty's cold hand lay in that of her companion, who appeared to be in nearly as much trepidation as she.

When the vehicle stopped and he lifted her out to the pavement she cast an apprehensive glance about her, saw that they were in a respectable part of New York, a large church looming up before them, and by its side the handsome rectory toward which he guided her failing steps.

Kitty was dreadfully agitated. Her conscience stung her like the touch of a scourge; the thought that she was about to become the wife of the man she loved so rashly and had known so brief a time was of itself enough to shake her nerves; but that she was marrying him in this clandestine manner made her a hundred times more nervous. She would have gone back to the school, even from the very threshold of the rectory; only that fond murmur was at her ear—that firm hand led her on.

None of her agitation was due to a doubt of the man she had trusted her fate to. For him she had only admiration, love—in him, perfect faith.

The bell was rung; a servant showed them into a small reception-room and went away smiling. He knew, by the young lady's appearance, what their errand must be.

The rector was at dinner; they had to wait a few minutes. Beyond an occasional reassuring whisper the count spoke not a word. Kitty's eyes were full of tears—everything swam before her sight.

Presently the minister came in. The count took him aside, conversing with him earnestly for a few minutes. The license was shown, the reverend gentleman convinced of his respectability, and that nothing stood in the way more serious than an unreasonable whim of the young lady's father; he had heard of the Count Cicarini, and felt rather proud of being the one to marry him.

So Kitty stood up by the man of her heart's choice, said over the solemn words as she was instructed by the rector, felt the ring slipped on her finger, the kiss of her husband on her lips—heard, as in a dream, the congratulations of the two or three who had come into the room as witnesses; then the two were out in the cold night air again, and the carriage was whirling rapidly away to the hotel where the count had taken an apartment just before he had gone for his bride.

They were to take the eight o'clock train for Washington, and the South, the count's baggage had already been forwarded to the depot; but he had chosen to spend the intervening hour and a half at the hotel rather than in the railway waiting-room.

Kitty looked like a very modest little traveler, in her merino dress and blue ulster. She attracted no particular attention as she passed through the entrance of the hotel on her husband's arm.

"I have registered here simply as Signor Carlo," her companion explained to her, "so that we may escape publicity."

As they took seats in the elevator to ascend to the floor on which their apartment was situated, an elegant-appearing woman, dressed in black, threw back her veil and gazed steadily at the count. Kitty did not notice her at all; her heart beat too high, her eyes were too full of tears, she was too absorbed in her own strange adventure, to give attention to anything going on around her.

The count, however, *did* notice the lady immediately on entering the elevator. He gave her one swift, surprised glance, then turned his back on her and kept his face away.

She left the elevator when he did, followed after the pair, and, as they went into their room, pushed in after them.

A single gaslight was burning in the handsomely-furnished apartment, not very brightly at that.

"Who are you?" asked the gentleman, haughtily facing the intruder.

"It is the duchess!" cried Kitty, under her breath. "Oh, madame," she said, quickly, "why do you come here? We are married—I am his wife, now!"

The count took the lady by the arm and would have pushed her out of the room; but the lady shut the door and turned the key.

The two looked each other full in the face.

"My God!" moaned the lady, "it is as I feared!"

The man made a desperate effort to open the door and force her out.

"Get out of this, you devilish duchess!" he hissed, in his anger.

"Not until I have told this young lady what she ought to know. Who do you think you have married?"

"The Count Cicarini," answered Kitty, proudly. "I wish you would go away, madame, and not make trouble between us."

"Ah, Heaven, no! It is *not* the count! He is dead—dead—as I knew—as I saw with my own eyes! Child! this is but an impostor. I know him well. The count's secretary—courier-agent. Cease! thou vile impostor! Lay not a finger on the Duchess de Villiere! This child shall know all!"

The man's hand fell by his side; his face was black with rage.

"Trust not a word she says to you, my angel. Ask her what *she* is! I will return to Venice and proclaim her story there."

"She knows my sad history; I told it to her this very day. Only, I had heard, from a Mr. Fenn, that my adored Count Carlo was still alive. I believed that he might have been saved, by some great miracle, and I sought him to assure him that I loved him still—that the duke was dead—and I was free to marry him. I came here to see my count and I find his agent, aping his dead master, masquerading in his noble employer's name, using his knowledge of the count's affairs to practice a base deceit. Mademoiselle, I warn you! You are married to him, you say; but, it is not too late to fly from him—to shelter yourself again in your father's arms. You can have no happiness, the victim of a villain like this. Come with me! I will remain by your side until we reach your father's house."

"You are my wife," said the count, seizing Kitty's hand. "No power on earth can save you from that fact. Do not listen to this mad lady's story. It was known in Venice that she was insane—from love—unreturned love—for me. My Kitty, my own little wife, angel of my life, regard her not!"

Kitty, with clear, bright, burning eyes was gazing up at him.

The light was dim; but she saw that some great change had come over the face of him she loved—she was afraid of him. There was that in his voice, too, which struck terror to her soul. She turned toward the door. A dread of the evil she had brought on herself overpowered her for a moment; the next it lent wings to her feet.

"Come!" she cried, to the strange lady.

The man seized her and hissed into her ear:

"Go, now, if you will. The game is up. Remember, however, that you are my wife. I shall come for you—soon. You are mine. You cannot hide from me. I shall come for you!"

These were the last words she heard as she broke from him and ran out into the hall.

"Be very quiet; we do not care for a scene here. He will not venture to pursue us, for he has made himself liable to punishment," whispered the lady, restraining her; for Kitty, in the revulsion of feeling, would have leaped over

the railing down upon the marble floor of the rotunda. "Be prudent. Here is a servant who will show us out of a side door. Be brave, poor child."

The two ladies got out of the hotel, hurried down to an avenue back of the house and took the cars for the Brooklyn ferry. It was during the long ride to the water that Kitty—whose whole being was filled with a wild terror lest her husband should attempt to claim her—thought of Mrs. Armory, and the safe refuge a home so humble would probably afford.

Here Madame Modena—as she was known in this country—left her in the lower hall, and went on to her own boarding-house.

The agony of heart and mind which Kitty suffered through the long week that followed, resulted, as we know, in a resolve to return to the man she had married. After her first wonder and terror were over, she knew that she loved him still.

The picture of his beauty, his fascination, grew before her longing eyes. What if he had deceived her as to his real title and position in society? Had she loved him because he was a count? Had she not money enough for both of them? Were not his eyes just as dark and beautiful—his voice as melting—his love-words as sweet as before? What could she do better?

Her father was angry; her future could never be what it would have been under other circumstances; she had married this man, whatever he was, and must make the best of it.

"He may have been dreadfully tempted to this deception. Think! what a temptation it *must* have been to him! He has good qualities; he is loving and charming, or I would not worship him as I do. It may humble my pride—it has rendered my faith in him less perfect—but I will go to him 'for better or worse.'"

When Kitty left her father's house and went to see Lilia she had not expected to find her husband there. She believed him to have left New York, and that it would be some days before she could communicate to him her resolve. It was her idea that he was somewhere in hiding in the vicinity.

When she saw Carlo actually standing there in Lilia's parlor, by the piano, in the very attitude in which she had first beheld him, that night of her surreptitious visit to the reception, all the dark realities of the past few days faded out as completely as if they had never been; a flood of love and joy descended upon her sad, tired heart; she flew to him as naturally as the bird to its nest, and laying her little sunny head on his bosom, sobbed out:

"I have come back! I am your loving little wife, Carlo!"

Then it was that the count—or the count's double—or whoever he was, gently pushed her away from him, saying:

"I grieve to tell you that it was not I you married, my poor Kitty! A scoundrel personated me in the letter and in the ceremony. I would not have asked you to break the promise we both gave. There is a long story to tell you, my poor child. Sit down here, where we are all your friends, and listen to it."

But Kitty could not listen to the story that night. All this was too much for her overstrained endurance; she dropped quietly into his arms and sunk into unconsciousness. Mrs. Bayard had her carried up-stairs and laid in bed, and a physician sent for.

CHAPTER XIII.

THREADS TOO TANGLED FOR STRAIGHTENING.

Who married the other? Blame or praise,
Where was the use then? Time would tell,
And the end declare what man for you,
What woman for me, was the choice of God.

—BROWNING

It would be difficult to say whether Lilia or Florian was the most astonished at that unexpected declaration from the lips of the count—made to the girl they had supposed to be his wife—that it was not he who had married her!

Lilia was so taken up with Kitty's illness that she could not stop to listen, then, to any explanation; but Florian, as soon as Mrs. Bayard and her daughter were out of the room, and a servant had been dispatched for their family physician, laid his hand heavily on Cicarini's shoulder, saying:

"Count, I must have a full and free explanation of what you have avowed. The young lady whom you disavow having married is cast off by her father, but she is not without protectors. I, for one, assume the part of a brother toward her. You must answer to me for your conduct to her."

"You are no more puzzled by this strange misapprehension of Miss Kanell's than I am, Mr. Fenn. I started for Washington on the morning of the day on which the marriage was said to have taken place; I caught cold during the journey and was laid up at my hotel with a light attack of inflammation of the lungs. By means of this confinement to my room and illness I did not chance to notice the remarkable story in the daily papers about my marriage and my wife's unaccountable flight from me directly after the ceremony, and her conjectured suicide, until late last evening. No words of mine can express my utter wonder. I was forbidden by my physician to leave my room; but I took the morning train home, and here I am. I came directly here, hoping to gain information here that would give the clew to the puzzle."

"This is all very strange, Count Cicarini."

"You can easily verify my statement. Telegraph to the hotel, and to Doctor Y—, my physician, in Washington."

"But, sir, you may have left New York in the evening instead of the morning."

"That is—after the marriage?"

"Yes."

"There is no use in my resenting the insinuation you make, Mr. Fenn. There is some intolerable mystery here. Let us keep our tempers, and try to get to the bottom of it. Would I, who am betrothed to Miss Kanell, who respect as much as I love her, be the one to bring this painful notoriety upon her? Do me justice. Come, is there no clew to this strange affair? Have I been personated by some scoundrel, or is that dear angel the victim of some mad fancy? It may be that her mind is affected by the vehemence of her wish to get away from that school."

"No, no. It is nothing of that kind. I have what may prove to be a clew. It is very extraordinary, view it as we will."

"If you have the slightest information, I trust you will confide it to me, Mr. Fenn. This matter is making me ill—wretched."

The count began to pace up and down the room in an excited manner. Florian watched him with keen observance. Which was the impostor? Had he wronged this young gentleman, after all, by his suspicions, and was the other man the rogue?

It must be so.

Cold chills crept over him as he thought how easily and deftly the Count Cicarini of the Tremont House had wiled from him those particulars of the New York count which would enable him to do what it was becoming evident he had done—personated the real count and hurried on to New York to fool Miss Kanell into a marriage with himself. Florian remembered, vividly enough in the present light of events, the deep interest the second nobleman had shown in the young lady, her beauty, and especially her independent heirship to half a million dollars. Could it be possible that, in the snowy twilight, and afterward, he had personated the real lover so successfully as to marry her before he was detected?

In fact, without being detected at all by Kitty, since it would seem that she really believed she had married this man into whose arms she had rushed half an hour ago, and that she must have had some still hidden motive for abandoning him.

The more he pondered it the deeper the riddle grew to Florian. However, there was nothing to do but to tell this man all about that double of his whom he had met in Boston, and to confess that he had believed him the real count and had given him full information as to the doings of the one in New York.

"It is Alberto," asserted the count, when Fenn had finished his confession. "I did not think the villain had courage and wit enough for so bold a stroke as this. I did know that he was somewhere in the United States, cutting a figure on my money and enjoying his farce as count. I considered it a good joke on the Americans and was willing to wait until I chanced to meet and confound him. I was willing he should be amused for a year or two at my expense. I am rich—I don't mind a few thousands—the fellow's impudent coolness gratified my sense of the absurd. The truth is, I spoiled him, by making so much of a pet of him. But this passes forgiveness. If I find the rascal, I will whip him within an inch of his life, or run my dagger through his ungrateful heart."

"He thought me dead at first—that excused much. When he heard from you that I was still alive, he should have repented of his evil deeds. He has done the worst thing in his power. He has put a base insult upon the

young lady to whom I was betrothed. He must die. There is no other way to place her again where she was before he threw this chain about her. My poor little love!"

The count could not keep still a moment. He walked up and down incessantly; his fingers worked as if he clasped a dagger in them; his dark eyes flashed red fire.

Thus far Florian had told him nothing about Madame Modena. This was a secret of his own which he held for his own purpose. It was his intention to ask the count to meet him here at Mrs. Bayard's at ten in the morning and there bring the Italian lady to confront him. She would put all doubts at rest as to his identity. She would know whether this was the master or the man. So he held his tongue about her.

It seemed a little strange to Florian that, if this were the true count, and he had loved the lady who mourned him so faithfully, he should so soon have transferred his attentions to Kitty.

"How did your agent come to believe you dead, count?"

After a moment's hesitation Count Carlo answered him.

He confessed that he had been enamored of a lovely duchess, who had been compelled by her parents to marry against her will; told how he had gone to the festival to say farewell to her; how the jealous duke watched them, wounded him in the back and threw him into the canal.

"I was insensible under the shock of the wound for a moment, but I must have breathed, or I never should have arisen to the surface of the water as I did. The chill bath revived me, so that I was able, by slight exertion, to keep afloat. I remained very quiet for some little time; I saw my own gondola go off; when all was safe, although feeling very weak, I managed to swim a little distance, but would soon have sunk, to rise no more, had not a boat passed me when I had just voice enough left to faintly call out. It proved, fortunately for me, to be a boat from the convent, with three priests returning thither. I fainted as soon as I was drawn into it, and they, not knowing where I belonged, took me with them. When I came to consciousness I was in the convent, and my wound had been dressed. I was warned that I was in a critical condition—must not move or speak. So there I lay for long weeks. I had plenty of time for reflection. As soon as I was able I begged the good fathers to keep my secret, confessing to them my name and the fault for which the attempt to assassinate me had been made. I declared the lady and myself guiltless of any wrong deed, except that we could not overcome our affection for each other, and I had decided to go away. I caused one of the priests to make cautious inquiries about my affairs in the city. He reported the general belief that I had gone abroad, recommending me not to disturb this belief, as it would prevent gossip injurious to the duchess, and, at the same time, if she believed me dead, be the best means of weaning her from a hopeless attachment. To all this I assented. But I had much curiosity to know how it was that I was considered to be on my travels. When well enough to visit the city surreptitiously I did so and ascertained the trick Alberto was playing. Of course, he believed me dead, or he would not have ventured upon it. I remained with the monks several months, until the confinement became too irksome; and then—making a single confidant of an old friend in Venice who lent me money until I should choose to come back to life and claim my own—I started off on a long tour and arrived in the United States, as you know, last August. I have wondered at not meeting my double before this."

"He informed me that he had been traveling in California," said Florian. "Count, how does it happen, if you were so infatuated with the duchess, that you fell in love with Miss Kanell so easily?"

"I think I had outlived that passion," was the candid reply. "The monks talked to me so incessantly about the sinfulness of it—I had so much solitude in which to reflect on the hopelessness of it—I wanted so earnestly to act honorably—that I was enabled, day by day, to see the image stamped upon my heart gradually fade out."

"I was a sad, thoughtful man while I seemed to mingle freely in your pleasant society here. Miss Kanell burst upon my somber vision, a delightful creature of sunshine, high spirits, wit and youthful charms. Her very follies enchanted me—by contrast with my own gloomy past. I saw, too, that she liked me—soul, fancy and heart were once more fired with all the delight of life. I threw off the past, yielded to the charm, loved her! Poor child!"

"Everything has gone wrong," thought Florian. "What would he say if I told him that the duchess was a widow, and adored him still? Oh, what a tangle matters are in! 'Poor Kitty,' indeed! Well, to-morrow this duchess in disguise shall meet her count face to face. Then we shall see what comes of it."

"I shall put the detectives on Alberto's track, this very night. He shall be punished to the full extent of the law. He has gone too far to expect my forgiveness. The marriage ceremony shall be undone. It was but a cruel fraud—the judges will see it so. Are you going, Mr. Fenn?"

"Yes. I would like to meet you here at ten to-morrow."

"Very well. Ah, I cannot tear myself away until I hear that my poor angel is better. I wish some of them would come and tell me how she is."

Florian, also anxious to know if Kitty was better, still hurried away, for he wanted, if possible, to see Madame Modena that evening.

On reaching his boarding-place, however, he was told that madame had left that morning, with all her baggage, to sail on the steamer for Havre on her way back to Italy.

Florian fairly groaned when he heard this news.

"Could anything be more perfectly exasperating?" he asked himself.

It seemed as if the Fates and the Furies were up in arms against poor little Kitty.

CHAPTER XIV.

TELLING HIS LOVE.

"Too proud to fly, too weak to cope,
I yet will wait, nor bow my head;
Those who have nothing left to hope,
Have nothing left to dread."

* * * * *
I do not blame thee that my life
Is lonelier now than even before."
—OWEN MEREDITH.

A JUNE sunset "dying like a dolphin" in western skies.

Nothing could be lovelier—in that way—than the grounds about Mr. Kanell's Newport cottage, called "Summer Rest," in an hour like this, when the soft, steady splendor of the breezeless day was melting from gold to rose. The wide lawn and liberal parterre were fresh with that flawless loveliness of the first summer month before dust or insect comes to annoy. There was a summer-house at the rear of the flower-garden, looking like a temple of roses, so covered was it with the sweet-breathed beauties. Still behind this was a terrace or promenade, the foundation of solid rock, from which one could look down on the glorious bay, shining in one great mass of liquid gold, for not a breath stirred its surface. On the sea-terrace a figure in white flitted slowly to and fro.

Men were busy in the grounds putting up hundreds of Chinese lanterns. A handsome flag streamed from its staff above the cottage. Thousands of other smaller ones hung from every available spot in shrubbery and tree and window. Preparations were evidently going on for a fête that evening.

It was true that Mr. Kanell, usually so unsocial, was going to give a large fancy-dress party for his daughter. There was nothing which he could do for her in those days that was too much.

Was that Kitty, walking on the promenade, gazing thoughtfully off on the ocean? Yes, Kitty, six months older than when we saw her last, but a child in years still, not seventeen.

Six months had worked a wonderful change! Kitty would be Kitty—the creature of impulse, not reason—until she died. As she walked now, her hands were clutched together nervously, her blue eyes had a strained look. She was thin and pale. The roses had deserted their throne on her cheeks. Her dimples had fled. The sweet, firm little mouth, that seemed made only for kisses and resolute avowals of girlish will, had a piteous droop at the corners. There was something in her whole expression, face and figure, the opposite of her natural persistent manner—a shadow of fear—of dread—a look as of one pursued.

Even here, in her own father's grounds, within sight of the house, with the servants busy at their decorative-work, she cast many a glance behind her, as she paced up and down.

The blue eyes were almost too large for the pale little face now. But, the golden-brown hair gleamed like the wing of a bird, ever changing, as she moved, with the splendor of sunset falling over her slim figure; there was something about her more interesting than mere beauty.

though she was lovelier than before mental suffering had whitened her cheeks.

Kitty was no longer a thoughtless school-girl craving adventure—wild for something romantic and out-of-the-way. She had had more of adventure than she asked for. She was sick at heart to think of the misery she had brought on herself. Yet she was not tamed. If the temptation came she might do things as wild as she had done in the past. Adventure! there was never in the wide world a girl who had fallen into such a strange entanglement as she! Vain to struggle!—it only drew the net tighter about her young feet.

Some one came out from amid a group of workmen on the lawn and walked over to where she stood, she having ceased her slow promenade and put her lily hand over her blue eyes to shade them while she looked at a distant ship, a snowy speck on a sea of gold.

"Miss Kanell."

Kitty had never owned herself a married woman since the night when Count Carlo had assured her she was not *his* wife; when she went home from her weeks of illness at Lilia's she went back as Kitty Kanell.

Kitty started from her reverie and looked around:

"What is it, Mr. Armory?"

"The tent is up, the music-stand erected, the flags and lanterns arranged—is there anything else you would like me to attend to?"

"I know nothing about it, Mr. Armory. I take no interest in it—did not want the party. It is all papa's doings; you must go to him for directions."

Philip ought to have bowed and gone away. He simply could not. To be alone with this girl whom he hopelessly loved—to stand by her side a moment, thrilled through with the sad look of eyes which should have been all sunshine—to stand there alone, with her, the blue heaven overhead, the perfume of roses in the air, the eternal sea hushed in a golden silence far below them, her pale face stained with the pale rose of the sunset—there was an anguish of pleasure in the occasion which fastened his feet to the ground.

He looked at her—her eyes drooped, for his were forever betraying their secret. She was always vexed with him; yet she could never forget what his mother had done for her in the time of her need; her first act, on returning to her father, had been to petition him to restore Philip Armory to his place with such an advance of salary as should more than recompense him for the time lost, and Mr. Kanell had at once complied. For the harsh man had not forgiven his daughter until she had gone 'down into the shadow of the valley of Death,' then, in his bitter fear of losing her and his sore repentance of his own severity, nothing that he could do was too much to please the frail invalid, slowly climbing back to health and him. Kitty stood far more chance than before of being spoiled. Her father almost counted the breath she drew until she was well; then his efforts were directed to cheer her, to arouse her from the morbid melancholy which threatened.

The grand reception and ball of to-night was only one of his many schemes to interest Kitty.

Perhaps the thoughts in which she had indulged had made the young lady more than usually nervous. To be nervous is to be irritable, and as Kitty felt the earnest eyes of Philip lingering on her face, and saw that he did not go, her little slipper began to tap the ground with impatience.

"I wish you would go away, Mr. Armory. I came out here to be alone."

He was used to rudeness from her; but this time he flashed up.

"I wish I could go away, where I would never see you again, Miss Kanell. If it had not been for my poor mother, I never would have accepted employment from your father again. I wish that I could free myself. Better to tear the heart out of my bosom with one mortal wrench of agony than to bear this constant strain—this dull, hopeless pain—this wearing wish and longing for the woman who can never be mine. Great Heaven! what do you know of such suffering?"—sternly. Then, after a brief silence: "I did not mean to talk in this way! I never meant to open my lips. It is all wrong—wrong. You cannot pardon me, I know. All the excuse I have to offer is, that I am insane with long suffering and did not know what I was saying to you, Miss Kanell. I—a poor clerk—to you! Well, the mischief is done. Kill me with a look."

"It is not that you are poor, Mr. Armory," said Kitty, looking gravely into the pale, passionate, beautiful face; "it is because I am an-

other man's wife that you should have refrained from saying such things to me."

"Another man's wife. Wife! sacred and sweet name! Do you consider yourself married to that thief, that forger and scoundrel—into whose face you have never even looked—whom you would not know if you were to meet him, eye to eye? There is not a court in the land which will not free you from a tie forced on you by so monstrous a deception—free you without a day's hesitation. Why does your father allow the matter to rest in this form? Why has he not long ago sundered every legal claim which that scoundrel may some time see fit to assert?"

"We have never talked about it: the subject was too painful."

"Ay, but there is danger. Miss Kanell, for your own sake free yourself from any possible danger."

"A very shadowy danger, Mr. Armory. That impostor will never venture to show his face in this country again."

"If he should?"

"I would hand him over to the detectives."

"Yet you call yourself his wife?"

"Facts are facts, Mr. Armory."

"No wonder you are pale and worn, poor child," said Philip, gazing tenderly into the weary, beautiful face. "Poor child! poor child! But you are mistaken in your feelings—the marriage was a fraud—you are not bound—your father ought to be approached on this subject."

"Let us end this strange conversation, Mr. Armory. You say things to me which would be an impertinence in another person; but I forgive you. Only, never presume again."

"An impertinence—to speak from the heart! I dare say it is. I did not mean to. No one can be sorrier for what I have said than I am. God knows I have loved you ever since the day—when you were a little girl of ten—and I a mere boy—that I first saw you slipping into your father's gloomy office like a sunbeam. Then—you came to my mother in your trouble, and I loved you a million times more than ever. Thank God, mine is not utterly a selfish love. What makes me wretched is your unhappiness. If I could see you the bright, bewitching, wild little creature of a year ago, I would be satisfied never to speak with you again. But—let it rest. Only, let me say this—if I can serve you, prove myself your servant, your humble friend, if I can do any least thing for you, if you ever need a true friend such as I am, remember me."

"Thank you," said Kitty, a little coldly.

Philip started to walk away; then turned and said:

"When you become of age, then will be the time when you must be on your guard. Half a million dollars are too large a prize for a penniless villain like that to forego. There will be traps laid for you, then, I forewarn you."

"You are trying to put me in good spirits for to-night, Mr. Armory. Ten thousand thanks; and now I will go dress for the fête. What will your costume be?"

"If Mr. Kanell had not asked my assistance, I should not be present at all. A plain black domino will hide me from the scorn of your aristocratic friends, I dare say."

Kitty's heart was heavy as she walked beside the lovely flower-beds, on to the terrace, in at a window and up to her airy chamber overlooking the sea. It was not that she had time or energy to pity the man who had betrayed to her his love. He went out of her weary, languid thoughts as soon as he passed out of her sight. She stood by the window and looked far, far over the bay, out to the purple ocean glistening darkly in the falling twilight. No wonder she loved to gaze at the sea. Her heart was beyond it, in moldering Venice, whither Count Carlo Cicarini had gone for the present. She loved him as madly as ever—did he expect to keep his troth with her, when this fearful mystery of that night's clandestine marriage was straightened out?

Often her soul failed her with the fear that he would not. His affairs at home had made it necessary for him to return to Italy for a year—what would be the end of it all?

She had not heard from him once since he went away.

She had received an unsigned letter in a feigned hand, just before they came to Newport, saying that the count had forgotten his American *affaire de cœur* and returned to his first passion, a proud and youthful duchess who had become a widow while he was away on his travels—that the whole of patrician Venice was look-

ing forward to a splendid and early celebration of their nuptials.

This anonymous letter bore the London postmark. Kitty had felt, with a strange shudder of aversion and apprehension, that it had been sent her by that man whom she had never seen, except through the mist of blinding tears, that night on which she left the convent. She would not have believed the letter anything but a vile slander, had not the count failed to write, and had she not heard the avowal of that lady who had come to her at the convent, and afterward confronted her at the hotel.

"My darling Miss Kitty, 'tis high time we were about the dressing," spoke the voice of Eliza, recalling Kitty from her wandering dreams. "Faix, there never was a fairy in all Ireland wid a dress to compare wid yours. The queen o' the fairies herself will be nowhere the night. I'm half-afraid to touch it fer fare it milts under me touch! Ah! the cunning little wings ov it! An' the glimmering butterflies fer yer beautiful hair, me darlin'. Ah, the rose-color petticoat of satin an' the long silver train—pure cloth o' silver, yet light as gauze! D'ye mind the blue silk, Miss Kitty? Och, I'll not blunder on mintoning that the night, to make us fale sad. Oh, me! what a cunning bit mask! Sit down, darlin', an' let me do yer lovely hair."

"There won't be a young lady the hull length ov Bellevoo avenoo will be half so pritty as mine. They may thry as they like—mine is just made so. It's all crinkly down yer back you'll have your hair, isn't it, Miss Kitty?"

"There's a yacht down in the bay which I don't recognize, Eliza. It can't move an inch for the want of a breeze. I watched it for some time, when I was out on the rock. Somebody is out of temper, I'll be bound, to be caught in such a calm!"

Only the faintest touch of pink and amber now tinged the glassy surface of the bay. Kitty watched, with dreamy interest, the listless sails of the unknown yacht until her maid drew down the blinds and lighted the burners on either side of the tall mirror in which soon arose a vision of beauty—our Kitty robed as Titania.

It was not possible that this fairy personage could have, by any subtlest intuition, linked her fate with that little vessel whose slender masts and spars stood out blackly against the starry summer sky. No, it was only by chance that Kitty had been fascinated by the becalmed and unknown yacht.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT THE YACHT HAD TO DO WITH THE MASQUERADE.

"In the beating of the breakers,
As they break upon the beach
Thro' the silence of the night,
Comes a warning in my ear—
'Not here, not here, not here!
But seek her yet, and seek her,
Seek her ever out of reach,
Out of reach and out of sight!'"

—OWEN MEREDITH.

"WHAT an unreal world! How weird, fantastic and fascinating! With Queen Titania on my arm, flitting about these illuminated grounds, with the unnatural light of the red fire and the blue fire on the astonished faces of the flowers, with the darkness circling outside the magic ring of pleasure, the dark vault of heaven overhead, the low thunder of the surf heard by chance when the bewitching music ceases—upon my oath, my revered queen, I scarcely believe myself longer a mortal but some happy spirit of a magic realm. How fortunate that I should have been inspired to come as Bottom when I had no knowledge that my fair hostess would rule as Queen Titania!"

"How dare you assume that I am any creature of earthly mold? Name me no name. I am Titania: seek not to identify me with the youthful mistress of the fête."

"Your hair betrays you," answered in low tones the cavalier on whose arm Kitty was promenading the garden. "There is no other woman with such magnificent hair of that gold-brown tint."

"I wish I had put it up, then. However, when we unmask at supper, I shall have the laugh on you! You will see how greatly you were mistaken. There is other hair finer than Miss Kanell's. You must have some of the juice of that enchanted flower after which Puck was sent, squeezed on your eyelids, Monsieur Bottom."

"That may account for it. The juice, instead of being pressed upon the queen's eyes, has been put on mine."

'The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make a man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.'

You were the first 'live creature' that I met,
my gracious sovereign."

He said this so lightly and merrily that Titania was not in the least disconcerted by the play at gallantry. She laughed and made some gay rejoinder, as they went on and on, from one blossom-bordered alley to another, the scene constantly changing as different colored lights were sent up, producing magical effects.

People, in wonderful and elegant costumes, were dancing to entrancing music played in the open air. Princes were drinking sherbet, princesses eating ices in an illuminated tent, bright flags hung lazily; the green of the trees and grass came out weirdly in the changing lights. Kitty's spirits had risen ever since she had left her dressing-room. Poor child! not yet seventeen! It was quite natural that she should sometimes forget her one great trouble, and be the Kitty of old—careless, willful, joyous. Under her silver-fringed mask she could play that she was all she used to be. Once or twice she had met her father, who inquired anxiously if she were pleased—if she were enjoying herself. Her answers had been eminently satisfactory, and Mr. Kanell had congratulated himself on the "happy thought" which had set him to getting up this brilliant masked party in the hope of amusing his daughter.

There was a black domino which followed Titania so closely that she would have been disconcerted had she not felt it to be only Philip Armory.

Philip had become Mr. Kanell's confidential clerk. It was business connected with the bank which had brought him to Newport to consult its president; Mr. Kanell had insisted on giving him a room in his house for the day or two he stayed, and thus it was that the clerk chanced to be a guest at the *fête*. He had made himself useful in directing the ornamentation of the grounds, for Philip had both taste and executive ability.

He was so near to Queen Titania and her "gentle joy" that he heard much of the badinage passing between the two.

"Why will not my tongue run like that?" he thought, bitterly. "Those who feel those things the least can say them best. Those whose passion is real suffer the misery of being tongue-tied. That conceited puppy carries his flattery too far; but his ass's head protects him."

He flung himself down in a garden chair, suffering the pair to pass out of his sight, losing himself in thought. His eyes rested on the beautiful scene before him—changing like the glowing figures of the kaleidoscope—without carrying any impression of it to his brain.

Meanwhile Bottom, with Titania on his arm, gradually drew her further and further from the dancers until they found themselves on the terrace where she had walked at sunset. There were fewer lamps here—if Kitty looked up she could see the great tremulous stars throbbing in purple space.

"How heavenly the music sounds from this distance," murmured her companion; "how lovely the lights look on the water! What a spot for an adventure! This zigzag path winding down the rocks to the beach below—what a field for brigand and pirate, if these were the days of old! Did you ever hear that fierce old song:

"Come away, come away, o'er the dark rolling sea,
For this night, or never, my bride thou shalt be?"

He trolled out the two lines in a rich tenor voice.

"What is this?" thought Kitty, as she faintly discerned two men in sailor costumes spring up into view from the path down the rock. The next instant she would have screamed—but it was too late—she could not make a sound. A silk handkerchief was over her mouth, a cloak was thrown over her head, she was lifted from her feet and borne rapidly down the path to the beach. Oh, the fierce, unequal struggle of those few terrible moments! As the caged bird beats its life out flying wildly, with palpitating heart, at its prison bars, so Kitty fluttered in the cruel grasp of her abductors—and as vainly. Fainting with fear of she knew not what, she felt herself placed on cushions in the bottom of a boat—there was a small private landing at the foot of her father's property leading out into the water, from which their own small boats were dispatched to Mr. Kanell's yacht—and a minute after, the swift, smooth motion betrayed that strong arms were at the oars. With one desperate effort Kitty sought to get the handkerchief from her mouth, to sit up, or leap overboard. The immovable power which kept her

where she was filled her with despair. The cloak was about her so closely that she was half-suffocated.

With the conviction that she was utterly helpless her frantic resistance gave way—a feeling that she was dying came over her—but it was only the stupor of unconsciousness.

When she came to her senses she was in the cabin of a yacht, lying on a lounge; a lamp swung from the low ceiling, on which was plenty of gilding and decorative painting; there was the usual furniture of such a place, very fine once, but now rather worn and dim, not so fresh as the satin and silver-maple of her father's little vessel. She saw these things dimly, without comprehending their significance for the first few moments. Then she gave a cry and sprang up. A middle-aged, dark woman sat near the foot of the couch.

"Ah! the madame has revived! Drink this, *mia cara*—'twill do you good."

Kitty pushed away the goblet she offered her. "Where am I? What have you dared to do to me? Take me home."

The attendant smiled as if the speaker were a child or a lunatic.

"I will speak to the signor, your husband," was her answer.

"Your husband!" The words fell on Kitty's ears like the shock of a thunderbolt. The horrid meaning of the strange situation in which she found herself flashed over her. Pressing her hand to her wildly-throbbing heart she stared at the woman as if she had gone mad. The servant, smiling more than ever, withdrew. The next moment a man came into the little cabin, closing and locking the door after him.

It was he who had played bottom, on whose arm she had hung. The ass's head still concealed his features.

"Fair Titania, welcome to your future home." If the lightning of those blue eyes could have killed him he would have fallen to the ground. She was as white as marble, but her eyes blazed fire. He knew perfectly well that this young, slender creature, standing there in her fairy robe of rose-color and silver, with the star of diamonds above her forehead, such a vision of beauty and elfish grace, would kill herself or him before she would allow him to touch her with his traitorous hand!

He did not wish to alarm her now, but rather to soothe. Removing his grotesque mask, he drew a chair to the center-table and sat down. The lamp shone down on him. For the first time Kitty saw the face of him who had played that cruel trick upon her, and assumed the count's place at the hurried marriage.

She had, indeed, looked up at him more than once that fatal evening, but always with tear-dimmed eyes. Now, she must perforce feel a strange curiosity in observing him.

He was a graceful villain, entirely at his ease. He was so remarkably like Count Cicarini that her heart bounded at the first glance. At the second she perceived all the difference between nobility and baseness, honor and dishonor, truth and falsehood; this was but a poor semblance of the man she loved, after all!

When Kitty was a little girl she was called a tom-boy. She had the courage and spirit of a boy. She now sadly needed all that spirit and determination which made her different from other girls.

The dark, brooding eyes of her visitor nearly quailed before the blaze of scorn and anger streaming from hers. Her lips curled.

"Take me back to my father."

Her clear tones rung vibrant through the little room.

"I beg your pardon, but that is impossible. Do you know what time it is? Five o'clock, and the sun is rising. If I take you back—what then? These five hours have decided your destiny: your father would refuse to receive you:

"The lights are fled, the garlands dead,
the *fête* is over, the masks are off. You have nothing to do but submit to your fate."

Sunrise! morning! If possible, Kitty grew paler than before. Out there, only a half-mile away, her own beautiful home lay smiling in the rosy light—and she was *here*! If she could have killed her abductor she would have done it willingly. She was only a girl, unarmed, defenseless, a prisoner. She moaned inwardly, but outwardly she made no sign. Her salvation must, somehow, some way, rest with herself. She must not falter—she must fight it out.

"Coward!" she said, "brute!"

"This is purely a business transaction," he answered her, coolly. "Listen to me. I have a proposition to make. Are you attending?"

The blue eyes met his own, firmly, defiantly.

"I do not desire to anger or distress you be-

yond what is necessary in arranging affairs between us. You are my wife."

"Before God, no!"

"Before men, yes. Listen. Why did I plan to bring about that marriage? I did not love you—you did not love me. With me it was a plan to provide myself with the fortune of which I stand in need. You are rich, in your own right. Good! you are my wife. I know, of course, that such a marriage is easily annulled. You would soon have taken the legal steps to free yourself. So, I have made sure of you. What I have done is entirely within the limits of the law. Were the officers of justice to come on board this vessel this moment they could not take you from me. My right is superior to your father's. But, I shall make myself still more secure. The sailors have but waited for the first breath of the morning breeze. You hear them now. You feel the motion of the vessel. We are off for a long voyage, *mon amie*. Frail as is our little craft she is a good sailer. We will spend our—honeymoon, is it you call it?—upon the blue summer ocean."

Kitty heard the rattling of ropes, the shouts of the sailors; she was conscious that the yacht fled swiftly through the water—she was alone with this man—and God.

"Is not God upon the water
Just as well as on the land?"

The lines of that song came into her mind and strangely upheld her.

All the time that she tried bravely to force down his smiling gaze, poor little Kitty prayed silently to the Great Helper.

Ah, if she were back in the convent again with the mild-faced mother and the gentle Sisters! It was her own waywardness had brought ruin upon her young life.

She was utterly helpless—she knew it—but still her brave blue eyes tried to look down those of this scoundrel who had trapped her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS.

"Oh, come, oh, teach me nature to subdue,
Renounce my love, my life, myself—and you!"

—POPE.

WHEN Florian Fenn—the evening on which Kitty had been taken ill at Mrs. Bayard's—had learned of the return of Madame Modena to Italy, he thought seriously upon what he had better do under the circumstances. He finally decided to tell the count the whole story of the duchess's visit to the United States under an assumed name, of her agitation at the discovery of his, the count's, existence, and of her sudden flight. He could only account for her return under the supposition that she was jealous, having heard of his marriage with Miss Kanell.

The count heard, the next day, all that Florian had to tell him. His agitation was great. Although no man can be strictly said to be truly in love with two women at one and the same time, there was everything to excuse the position in which Count Carlo found himself with regard to his feelings. His attachment for Laura had been of the most real and passionate kind. The mere fact that, in a country like Italy, he had planned to flee from her rather than involve her in the effects of his unfortunate passion, proved the purity and sincerity of his love.

However, after the duke had discovered that love, and he had so narrowly escaped with his life, during the long months that he remained with the monks, their efforts combined with his own, had brought him to look upon his love as a sin, and to make a firm effort to root it from his heart.

When he came to the United States and found himself the pet of a gay society he strove more valiantly than ever to put the past away and to begin a new, more hopeful life.

There was just left to the handsome young count that tinge of romantic sadness which made him more irresistible in the eyes of the other sex.

It was when his resolve to begin life anew was strongest upon him that he met Kitty Kanell at Lilia Bayard's party. Her girlish freshness, the spirited style of her *riant* beauty, her evident admiration for him, her lovely singing, interested him at once. We know how the acquaintance ripened rapidly into love, and all the consequences of their brief love-affair.

Florian, himself, as he told the story of Madame Modena, was full of bitter self-accusation. If he had not been so suspicious of the real count, he would, at once, have recognized the impostor as such when he met him in Boston. Instead of that, he had confided to him, like a perfect fool, those incidents which had enabled the false count to form and carry out a decep-

tion so bold as to have seemed incredible—only it was an accomplished fact.

It was he, Florian, who had given the impostor poor Kitty's name, her fortune, her residence at the Sacred Heart, her expected marriage, her quarrel with her father. Thus armed with all he wanted to know, Alberto, skilled in constant imitation of his patron's handwriting, had no difficulty in framing that letter which had decoyed Kitty from the walls of the convent. The snow-storm, the twilight, the girl's agitation, had all aided him in his design. He had calculated on the night as helping him to carry out the deception—had ordered the hotel servant to light but one burner in their room—and all would have gone successfully for Alberto had not the duchess, deeming him the real count, been on his track and thus frightened Kitty into flying from the man she had married but still supposed to be the one she knew and loved.

For all this how could Florian but feel the keenest regret?

Kitty's had not been the only important mistake of that miserable night, however. The duchess, upon confronting the supposed count and finding Alberto, naturally concluded that this impostor was the one of whom Mr. Fenn had told her. Inevitably, then, she inferred that Carlo, after all, was dead. In her new and utter despair at this she had gone back to Venice.

Florian told what he had to tell, honestly, blaming himself for the wretched mistake which might blight Kitty Kanell's life.

The count listened, torn with contending emotions.

He could not have foreseen how it would affect him to hear that the duchess was a widow—free to marry him. His old passion surged back with overwhelming force.

Yet, he remembered that Kitty loved him.

His love for her changed into warm affection. His admiration of her blue eyes, of her sweet looks, was as great as ever. Tears rushed into his eyes as he thought of her fond ways, her impulsive attachment to him. The fear for her peace distracted him. She had been horribly deceived. She was very ill. And now, he, too, must help to hurt and wound the poor little creature.

So he contrived to make himself as miserable as possible. His heart dragged him toward Venice; yet he would not leave until Kitty's physician pronounced her out of danger, and she was removed to her own home.

Then he had one interview with her.

He had come to confess to her about Laura. When he saw her poor, pale little face he could not bring himself to add another blow to that she had suffered.

"I will write to her when I get home," he said to himself, turned coward by the trusting appeal of those soft blue eyes.

He told her that Alberto's conduct had made it necessary for him to return to Venice to look after his affairs. He stated that he had paid detectives to find the scoundrel—that her marriage to the wrong man could and should be annulled—that she must keep up her old bright spirits—all would be well in the end—he must hurry home, but he would be back some day and surprise her—and he would tell her more when he wrote to her. Then he kissed her trembling lips, pressed her cold little hand, and was gone.

Kitty was left to heart-ache and fear and loneliness. If it had not been for Lilia's faithful friendship and Florian's brotherly kindness, she would have died.

Her father softened to her in those days of her suffering. He began to consult her whims, to indulge her caprices. He, too, lavished money on detectives, but the *bogus* count was never discovered. Kitty had grown so nervous that she felt, night and day, as if he lurked in her vicinity, ready to pounce upon and carry her off at any moment. When summer came her father took her to Newport in hopes the change of scene would free her from a fear which, to him, appeared foolish.

Meantime Count Carlo Cicarini had reached Venice. His first eager inquiry had been for his adored Laura.

The answer was a shock to him as great as any he had received. The young and lovely duchess—who had in vain sought to assuage her grief at the loss of her husband by lengthened travel in foreign lands—had returned more deeply dejected than ever and had immediately entered a convent in Rome, where, as a novitiate, she was preparing to take the veil which would close upon her the gates of the world.

Carlo hurried to Rome.

The day that he reached the convent a

funeral procession came forth from it; he was just in time to witness the obsequies of the beautiful Laura, who had died—so the nuns said—of a broken heart—broken by grief for the duke's death.

He had one glance at the exquisite features, still and proud, of his pale love, with the long black lashes resting on her cold cheeks—and then the world grew blank and intolerably dreary to him.

It was weeks before he even remembered that it was his duty to write a letter to Kitty.

When he did write he told her the whole story of his love for the lady who had broken her heart for him; and Kitty, remembering the lovely duchess, let fall a tear over her fate.

It was a hard letter for her to read, loving the writer as she did; but she could not be jealous of the dead, and the count said, at its conclusion, that he was coming to see her as soon as he had attended to his estates and settled another agent.

CHAPTER XVII.

TIGER'S CLAWS.

"Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind." —TENNYSON.

"Hateful is the dark-blue sky,
Vaulted o'er the dark-blue sea." —IBID.

THE yacht flew over the water. Outside, the clear morning was shining on a summer world; the blue water dimpled and darkened under the kiss of the ruffling breeze; the sun was rising on a splendid show of land and sea. Inside the little cabin the air was close, the yellow lamp-light was dull and sickly. The man seemed in no hurry to explain his intentions any further. He sat and smiled his cruel smile at the white-faced girl opposite him.

Kitty was as queenly, flashing back his cool regard, as Titania throned. The star above her forehead hardly quivered on its golden spiral, nor the rich jewels on arms and throat glimmered, so still she was, so haughtily, bravely quiet.

He ran his eyes over her glittering dress as if summing up the value of the gems with which she had lavishly adorned her fairy robe.

"I took you in good time," he said.

She made no answer.

"It is not the first time I have come into possession of some of your jewels, *mon ami*."

Kitty scarcely took in the meaning of what he was saying.

"That night, last December, when you were so imprudent as to go on the street with only your maid. When you came out of your house, I caught the glimmer of your necklace. I was in Brooklyn then, under another name, remaining in obscurity until I should receive remittances from Venice. If I had had a full purse, I should not have thought of it. As it was, the sight of those flashing diamonds inspired me with an idea. I followed you. I hung about that vicinity until your return. You know what happened then? After I got them prudence whispered to me—'Reserve them until the hour in which you can obtain no more from your master's treasury.' I did so. I took them to Boston with me, where I resumed my comedy of playing count. In the leisure of my own room—my remittances having arrived—I tore the diamonds out of their setting, which I destroyed, so as to render it impossible to establish the identity of the gems. It was the sale of them in Baltimore which enabled me to command this yacht for a few weeks. I have been in the harbor a week awaiting the opportunity of carrying off my bride. I heard of the masquerade—presto! just what I wanted! When I went up the path, in my costume, and stole among the others, who was to know that I was not an invited guest? I got one of your servants to point you out to me. The little affair was well managed—was it not? So, here we are. I recognized you as the one I robbed that night I married you. Curious, was it not?"

Alberto had a soft, agreeable voice. He spoke English as well he did French and Italian, except a slight clipping of some of the rougher words which made them more musical.

"It is curious," Kitty answered him.

He smiled more than ever when she had condescended to speak.

Kitty was thinking with lightning rapidity. Poor child, her strength, and with it her courage, were failing her.

She struggled to keep up her dauntless appearance.

With the art of a true woman she attempted to beguile this base creature—to outwit him, since physical courage could do no good.

"You did this because of my fortune?"

"For what else?—barring your delicious beauty, madame."

"Do not attempt gallantry. As you say, this is a business matter between us. I would like to buy you off from pressing this claim of yours. If you will place me back on the beach at the foot of my father's cottage, I will write and sign, here and now, a paper, giving you uncontrolled possession of half my property the day that I become of age."

"What is your exact age?"

"I shall be eighteen in a year and a half. That is not long to wait when you are sure of the money in the end."

Kitty's tones were matter-of-fact. Only the quivering of a jeweled butterfly on her bosom betrayed the heavy throbbing of her heart.

"With you I have all—and a handsome wife. Nothing can persuade me to approach shore in this vicinity. I might fall into arrest. Here I am sure and safe."

"You are not sure and not safe. My property is still my own, admitting that I am a married woman."

"Oh, but a husband has ways of controlling a wife," carelessly.

"No man shall control me!" said Kitty, with a look of which such blue eyes seemed incapable. "You have got me here by deceit and force. I wish you joy of your bargain. Have I no weapon of defense? *I have my temper*. I will make you so thoroughly sick of me that you will be sorry you ever saw me. I will hold on to my purse and defy you. You shall make nothing out of me—no, not enough to buy your cigars. You think to make me your victim—your purse-bearer—your humble and abused wife whom you can threaten into relinquishing her rights! You are mistaken. You can kill me, soon enough, but you cannot conquer me! I AM AN AMERICAN GIRL. I will die by inches before I will yield you one dollar of my fortune. You have trapped a panther, I tell you. You will find me an uncomfortable companion."

He was watching her with furtive cunning.

He studied her, even after she had ceased her tirade.

Had she shown one symptom of faltering he would have held to his first purpose. Kitty was fighting for more than life, and she looked at him resolutely—even laughed maliciously.

"I do believe you are a she-devil."

"I am worse than that."

"I can break that will, I think."

"Never."

"Well. It is certain there is no love lost between us."

"I shall hate you with deeper and deeper hatred every hour."

"You are entirely in my power. If I make terms with you, it will be such terms as the conqueror makes."

"Let me hear them."

He thought for a moment.

"Not now," he answered. "We are both weary and vexed. Teresa shall bring you some breakfast, and stay by your side while you sleep for a few hours. This afternoon at dinner I will have my proposition ready. You have but one thing to remember—that you are absolutely in my power, and have no choice but such as I offer you."

He arose from the table as he said this, unlocked the door and left her. The instant he was out of her sight the terrible strain on Kitty's nerves gave way—it seemed to her as if she flew in a thousand pieces, though really she only sunk down on the couch behind her and closed her eyes.

Gradually she gathered her senses together as some one repeated something over and over. At first the voice sounded far away like the murmuring of waters at the vessel's keel; at last she comprehended that the woman was speaking to her:

"What will madame have with her breakfast—tea or coffee?"

Kitty, pressing her two little hands tight to her aching temples, stared wildly at her.

The commonplace question was repeated.

This time she comprehended. She even went off into a mad laugh at the idea of being called "madame"—she, a little school-girl, to be madamed by this servant. What would the girls say? What would they say to see her, as she was then, dressed in the exquisite robe of Titania, a fairy in appearance, a prisoner in fact! Sobs and moans would not have been so tragical as Kitty's lunatic laugh.

"Madame is hysterical," said the servant, calmly: "I will bring her some lavender."

"I wish it were poison," exclaimed Kitty, when it was brought.

Knowing the necessity of keeping up her

strength and courage she drank the draught; for the same reason, also, she forced herself to eat a few mouthfuls of the dainty breakfast placed on the little table in the cabin, feverishly drinking two cups of *café au lait*. Teresa waited upon her young mistress, who watched her eagerly, hoping the woman would betray some sympathy for her. The dark, heavy, forbidding countenance was anything but encouraging.

"Do you not—will you not pity me?" Kitty cried, at last, turning her blue eyes appealingly to the black ones of Teresa.

"No, madame, you have a very good husband. I am not to talk to you about that. All on this vessel know that you are master's lawful wife. That is enough. It is your duty to obey him. I am to stay with you while you sleep."

"You will not leave me alone?"

"No, madame."

Kitty turned the key in the lock, drew it out of the ward and concealed it in her bosom. The servant took up a blue cambric garment lying across a chair:

"Here is a dressing-gown I was ordered to buy for you, yesterday."

Kitty was glad to get out of her inappropriate silver and satin. Teresa helped her to change her dress.

"Now, madame, I will comb out your hair.—It is wonderful hair," she added, when she had drawn the comb through it a few times—"I never saw any so pretty."

Her touch had something soothing and magnetic about it. Poor, tired, frightened Kitty found herself drowsing under it.

Presently the attendant, having loosely braided her hair, lifted her as if she were an infant and laid her comfortably on the couch when she almost immediately fell asleep.

Perhaps there was something more narcotic than lavender in the draught she had taken for she slept several hours.

When she awoke, starting up instantly in a fright, Teresa sat by her peacefully sewing.

"What time is it?"

"Two o'clock. Will madame be dressed for dinner?"

"Where is my dressing-room?"

Teresa put by her sewing, arose and drew back some faded curtains of amber silk at one end of the little cabin, disclosing a space beyond filled with a bed and bureau and conveniences for the bath and toilet.

Out of the wardrobe Teresa produced a black silk dress.

"I am afraid it will not fit, madame is so very slender; but I can alter it to-morrow while she is wearing her morning-gown."

"You seem to have known that I would come without my trunks," remarked Kitty, sternly.

"I knew you refused to live with your husband and would be brought by force, madame."

The girl's eyes flashed; she drew her lithe figure up to its full height, but she disdained argument with a servant.

She kept silence while her hair was arranged and the ill-fitting black silk put on.

"Would madame like to go on deck for the air, while the table is being laid?"

Kitty was faint, feverish and ill. She would like to go on deck. Teresa went first, not to "spy out the land," but to spy out the water. There were no vessels within hailing distance, and madame was permitted to ascend.

A heavenly air, cool and moist, blew in Kitty's face as she reached the deck. A couple of sailors saluted her respectfully; Teresa's manner was that of profound respect.

The prisoner stole a quick glance about on the blue expanse.

Was there no help she could appeal to?

None.

She must fight her desperate battle alone.

Her cheeks were as pale as lilies; but the fire in her blue eyes kindled to a feverish brightness. Yet she tried to be calm. Teresa placed a chair for her and she sat there nearly an hour. Her one effort was not to think. If she permitted herself to think of her father, of Carlo, even of Lilia, she would go mad, and lose all. She must control herself. Could she hope to triumph over the cruel, cunning villain who had caught her in his net, unless she were cooler, cunninger than he?

After what seemed an endless time, Alberto came, offered her his arm, which she refused, and conducted her down to the cabin where the first course of their *tête-à-tête* dinner was laid.

She sat, looking down at her folded hands, while the meal went on.

"At least, have some dessert," he said.

She took a bunch of golden Hamburgs for her

mouth was so parched that she was afraid her tongue would cleave to its roof. The cabin-boy, who had waited, was dismissed; the two were alone together.

Kitty raised her steady gaze to her companion. "Are you ready with your proposition, sir?" she haughtily asked.

"I am."

"Let me hear it, instantly; for I decline to remain alone with you."

"You are my wife, and you are in my power—"

"In one sense," interrupted Kitty.

"You are a beautiful woman; I am not insensible to your charms; yet, there is something I love more than woman's beauty. I am willing to compromise."

"I thought you would be."

"You must remain with me and pass for my wife before the world—"

"I will not."

"You cannot help yourself. After a month passed alone with me on board this yacht you will be more than willing to acknowledge yourself my wife."

A cold hand seemed to take Kitty's heart in its icy clasp; but she faced him down unflinchingly.

"Your terms, sir. I am not wholly in your power. In the State where we were married, a wife has control of her fortune after marriage. I have half a million dollars with which to buy my own wishes, sir. What is the compromise?"

"There is nothing for you to do, madame, but to accept the situation. It must be for your own interest to appear as my wife. I could never hope for a fairer wife. Still, as we both say, there is no love lost between us. The thing that I prize more than love or beauty is GOLD. Give me plenty of that, and you shall be free—free as air, except in name. I will promise never so much as to touch that lily hand; but you must be generous and give me all I ask."

"I told you I would give you half," was the eager reply. "I will do more—I will give you all. But you must take me home directly."

"That would not answer my purpose," he explained, with that maddening smile of his which made her want to kill him. "I should know that your father and friends would withhold what you have promised. I should not dare to press my claims, for I should be arrested and condemned to a prison for long years. No! no! I have you, and I propose to keep you. You must write to your friends—I will get the letter posted at the first harbor we put into—that you are with me, *willingly*—that you are living with me—and that you need money."

A moan burst from Kitty's white lips:

"I cannot do it! I cannot do it!"

"You must. By this means, I shall be safe from the consequences of my acts—crimes, if you like. The count will let me alone—your father will not arrest or annoy me, while you choose to share my life, as my wife. Do you see? In this way I make of you a wall of defense and a source of support. You are to keep me liberally supplied with money. But, I foresee that your father, who is your guardian, will refuse to furnish anything like what we shall require, so long as you are under age. Very well, you shall earn money for me. You have an exquisite voice. A young and pretty woman with a voice like yours, can change her notes into gold—a shower of gold," he added, his black eyes kindling with covetous light. "In ten years you can coin for me as much more as you now have—an hundred thousand pounds. Can you persuade me, with a few tears, to give that up? See the folly of trying! You need more training—very well! there is a piano in this cabin. I will be your teacher; we will improve our time this summer. I have a fine tenor. So, if the father is close, if supplies are short, we have something to bring us in money. When you have become reconciled to pass as my wife, we will go to Europe. You must also write to the count, forbidding him, for your sake, to molest me. In this way I shall be quite secure."

"If I consent to all this?" sobbed Kitty, passionately.

"Then I agree never to see you except in the presence of your servant—never to touch so much as your hand—to allow you to remain my wife only in name."

"I cannot trust such a fiend."

"You can trust me to attend to my own interests. It is my interest to keep to the bargain. It is also your interest to keep to it."

"I do not see that."

"Who will want you if you leave me after we have passed this voyage together?"

"Monster!" cried the poor girl, in an agony of grief and rage.

"You shall have plenty of time to come to my terms. There is nothing to hasten your decision. Only—we shall continue our little yachting expedition until you make up your mind."

He was smiling and affable again.

"It cannot be that I am in your power!" cried Kitty, bitterly. "I can kill myself—and I will! Yes, I would rather die a thousand times than even be called your wife!—than give you even a dollar of money extorted so shamelessly."

He came around to where she had arisen to her feet and seized her by her slender wrists—

"Promise me—swear to me that you will make no attempt at suicide."

There was something in his wicked look that made her promise. When she had sworn by the words he prescribed he released her.

"You are very young," he said then, coolly.

"Do not be rash. Life is too precious to be thrown away lightly. You have still much to hope for. I may die any day, or year, leaving you free to choose a mate that suits you better. There are chances in your favor still in the lottery of life. Submit to your destiny with a good grace."

"I have made all possible arrangements for your comfort on board this vessel. Teresa is your own especial servant. She shall be with you always, night and day. I will never speak to you except in her presence. Throw off all fear. Remember that it is to my interest to keep faith with you. Take time to come to a decision. We are provisioned for a month, and I propose to coast along up to Maine and Labrador through this warm season. There are a few books in that case, as you see. There is the piano, and songs *ad libitum*. You are as safe from me here as in your father's house. *Au revoir, madame.*"

He went gracefully out, and presently the odor of his delicate cigar floated down into the cabin.

It was no small prize at stake with this man. A penniless scoundrel, who had made himself liable to the law, there was nothing for him to do but to carry out his bold adventure as he had begun it.

Alberto was in good spirits as he walked the deck and enjoyed his after-dinner cigar.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PURPOSE THAT BECOMES MORE CLEAR.

Let silence be about her name,
And o'er the things which once have been;
Let silence cover up my shame,
And annul that face, once seen
In fatal hours. —OWEN MEREDITH.

DESPAIR!

That was the only word that fitted Kitty's mood when the interview was over. It was true that she drew a deep breath of relief when she remembered that he had promised not to annoy her personally; but the outlook into the future was so black that Kitty drew back shuddering, and dared not look again. All that evening and night she was sunk in a depth of misery where she could hardly think, or do anything but blindly suffer.

Time passes, whatever we do to prevent. Not even despair can last forever. It is as natural for the young and healthful to hope as it is to breathe. Teresa was kind and attentive to her young mistress. Her tormentor only made his appearance at dinner, the following day. The servant slept on the couch near her mistress's bed.

After the first day dragged a second, third, fourth, a week. Her very misery drove Kitty to seek relief from it in occupation. She began to take the books, one by one, from their case, and sit on deck, hours at a time, reading them. The little cottage piano became a companion, a friend. She played on it, sung to it—it seemed to her that it saved her from going mad.

The days were long and sunny, the nights were hot and still. As they went further north there was a fresh breeze night and day which sped the little vessel merrily on, and brought, perforce, faint roses to Kitty's pale cheeks.

She knew, one night, that they had cast anchor and that a small boat had been sent on shore; she was locked in her cabin, then; and the next morning there were strawberries and flowers on her breakfast-table. The poor child burst out into heartrending weeping at sight of them, and so lost her breakfast.

Alberto sent her down a new magazine to comfort her. She tried to read, but, for once, her tears would have full sway. Then, gradually, the fire of anger burned them up. She hated the dark-faced woman who sat there calmly

sewing. She hated the little close cabin, the sound of the vessel moving, the cries of the sailors; and, oh, with what an intensity of feeling she hated him who kept her there!

Learning that the lady was in a more than usually melancholy mood, Alberto strayed down into the cabin.

Kitty turned her tear-stained face away from him.

"I do not choose to receive visitors," she said.

"It is unfortunate that you cannot forget that you love the count," he remarked, with that never-ending, maddening smile of his.

Kitty blushed. He saw the red creeping up her throat and ear, though her face was averted, and knew his arrow had hit the mark.

"I wish you had him, for he is a fine fellow. These nobles, however, cannot have all the good things of life. When we slaves get a taste of the best it crazes us for more. Come! let me tell you something, *mon ami*. The same blood flows in my veins that flows in your grand count's. His father was my father. True, my mother was a poor, deceived peasant-girl—but what of that? I have the ambition of the Cicarinis. I claim their name. You are Madame Cicarini, after all! Let that content you. Now you understand why, when I supposed Carlo dead, I took up his title and his money and started out as a count. Why could not I be as grand as my half-brother? I did not look on it as all theft and imposture. It was my right. I like Carlo; if I had dreamed he was alive I should not have masqueraded in his garments. But, I had seen him assassinated and thrown in the canal, for a love-affair with a duchess; and so I tried my hand at playing his part in the world. You are not jealous of the duchess, are you, madame? Ten to one he is wedded to her by this time! He returned to Italy only to see her again.

"Come!" he added, after a pause. "Let us have a singing lesson. It will help you to forget these trifles. Tra-la-la-la! Here is the score of Faust—try this song of Marguerite's."

Well! the man was a good teacher. Kitty had obeyed his command to sing in the hope of partially hiding from his keen eyes how sharp was the pang she suffered at the bare idea that the count might be married to that lovely duchess.

As she poured forth in exquisite song the utterances of Marguerite's despair in the prison-scene Kitty became interested in her own work. Here was something to save her from madness and despair! Here was something to live for! Torn from friends and lover, bound to a cruel, loveless fate, here was something in which her anguish might find relief.

For, proud and sensitive to the last degree, the poor little aching heart had resolved that never—never would its trouble and disgrace be flung back upon former friends.

Kitty could never show her face to father or friends as the wife—the willing wife—of this nameless, unprincipled scoundrel. Yet it was only as his wife in name that she was to escape being so in fact.

Life had seemed to hold absolutely nothing for her.

The thought of becoming a great opera singer gave her a motive for living; something to work for, something to lift her out of this appalling monotony of the situation.

After that first trial of her singing powers Alberto had no fault to find with his pupil. Hours every day she sat at the piano singing, under his critical supervision, the leading female parts in many of the great operas.

The only thing over which the cold-blooded, miserly Italian ever grew enthusiastic was that pure, ringing, flexible young voice.

"Brava! brava!" he would cry, not only moved by the music, but dreaming of the gold that such a treasure would bring.

"How did you know that I could sing?" Kitty asked him once.

"That night on which you lost your necklace, the windows were open a little of the room in which you sung, and I, hanging about, waiting for your return, heard a wonderful voice. I should not have been able to identify it with you had you not been speaking with your maid about it just as I jostled you on the street corner—you said how frightened you had been."

Long, long, strange summer days! Forever floating in cool northern seas or lying with reefed sails during brief summer storms! Did ever a girl spend so strange a summer?

Did ever the cabin of a vessel throb and thrill and shiver to the echo of such singing? Alberto's voice was very fine.

Sometimes Kitty would dream that it was

the count singing to her the passionate love-music of the opera.

When she was not at the piano Kitty was on deck, sitting alone, her servant at a distance, the sailors never addressing her unless she first spoke to them, her pale face growing into a rarer, finer loveliness, her great blue eyes gazing fixedly at the green and flying water.

Alberto was worse than his word as to the time he would keep her isolated from everything on earth but that little yacht; the shortening days of August found them still afloat.

Kitty's past life grew to her like a dream. She no longer suffered in picturing to herself the distress of her father at her unexplained absence. The life at school seemed years away. She did not even vaguely wonder if Lilia and Florian were married yet. So intense had been her feelings at first that in their rebound she sunk into apathy.

Only one subject could awaken her to interest. That was the promise of him who held her prisoner that, in the coming winter, she should sing on the stage.

Would she ever sing to the young and beautiful Count Cicarini and that exquisite woman he loved before he fancied he loved her? Such a chance was quite amid the possibilities of her future, and Kitty lived only in imagining it.

For that she suffered and lived; for that she meekly obeyed her unrelenting master, toiling faithfully at the labor of making herself a great cantatrice.

One morning when she awoke she found the vessel at rest. Looking out of her little cabin window she saw that they were in some port; there were other vessels in the bay and quite a large city came crowding down to the water's edge with its warehouses and docks. Everything was novel and foreign to her eyes.

When Teresa gave her her breakfast, she said to her:

"Madame, we are in Scotland. We will leave the vessel to-day and go by rail to London. But, first, I must go up into the town and buy you something to wear. We shall not be ready to leave the yacht until afternoon."

Kitty aroused herself at these tidings. Anything was better than the terrible monotony which, but for her one relief of music, would have wrecked her brain. She even felt an instinct of pleasure in assuming, later in the day, the pretty traveling hat and mantle which Teresa had purchased for her; and a thrill of the same emotion on placing her feet on terra firma.

The party of three traveled all night and were in London the following day. They stopped for a week at a quiet hotel, where they were registered as "M. Franca, wife and maid."

Afterward it was always the same. Always M. Franca, as he now saw fit to call himself, kept to the letter of his agreement. Teresa was always by the side of her mistress. The relations between husband and wife were those of business alone.

Gradually Kitty lost all fear of the singular man who had compelled her into so strange a life. They went from London to Paris—from Paris to Milan—and in the latter city the heiress of half a million studied for her profession as arduously as the poorest pupil in the *conservatoire*.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE OPERA.

She comes, the spirit of the dance!

And, but for those large, eloquent eyes

Where passion burns in every glance,

She'd seem some wanderer from the skies.

—Mrs. Osgood.

"PHILIP, look here! It foots up £15,000 I have sent them in less than eighteen months! How long will my daughter's fortune last at that rate? Confound the scoundrel! I would go across the water to look after him, but Kitty hints, in her last letter, that they are coming over. I know what that means! Kitty is of age to-day. This is her eighteenth birthday. She is coming to demand her whole estate, I suppose, to lavish on that low-lived villain. It is one of the mysteries of the world, her going off with him. However, I wash my hands clear of the whole business. As she has made her bed, so she must lie in it. She was always willful—willful and untamable as the wind. If she wants to give her mother's money away to her husband, she will do it in spite of me. So I shall not interfere. One thing! If they come over, she must not bring that fellow near me! I will never speak to him. I will kick him out of my house if he has the presumption to set

foot in it. Philip, I wish I had never had a daughter!"

Mr. Kanell, darker, sterner, older, busied himself putting away in his office-safe the papers at which he had been looking. Philip Armory, now his confidential clerk, put his own desk in order, then stooped and locked his employer's safe.

"Come, Philip, let us home to dinner. It is getting late."

"Not so late as it seems, Mr. Kanell—only half past four. These long December nights shut down on us unexpectedly. It is snowing quite briskly outside."

Philip looked pale and nervous as he helped Mr. Kanell on with his great-coat. Not yet, oh, not yet, was he able to hear the name of the woman he loved without being stirred in every fiber of his soul and body. He had fought with himself long and well but the victory over his hopeless love was not yet his. How could that stern man speak so of his only child? The hot-headed young man could hardly conceal the indignation he felt.

Yet Mr. Kanell had been kindness itself to him. During those long weeks of agony and suspense, after Kitty's strange disappearance, Philip had made himself indispensable to the afflicted father, by his evident deep sympathy and the earnestness with which he flung himself into the search for the lost. The tenderest father could not have done more than Mr. Kanell did in those days to pierce the veil which hung over his daughter's fate. Yet, when, after more than two months of suffering all the pangs of uncertainty, there came to him, one day, a brief letter from Kitty, dated and post-marked London, avowing that she was living with the man she had married, and asking for a large remittance, adding that she sent her dearest love and hoped he would not trouble about her—after that day the haughty banker seldom mentioned his child's name, or seemed to take more interest in her than a stranger. Every month she had written for money; every month he had sent it punctually, without other word or message than was necessary to the business, not even deigning to check her in the mad extravagance which appeared to prompt her demands.

On this December day he had been going over his own private accounts, and looking over the affairs of the bank previous to the yearly statement. The officers and clerks had all gone except himself and Philip, some time before.

Now the two took their way home through the fast-gathering darkness, leaving the porter to close up the bank.

Philip now lived with Mr. Kanell. More, his mother was housekeeper for that gentleman—or rather, house-mistress would be a more correct term, for Mrs. Armory was simply the lady of the house, presiding with gentle dignity over its appointments. Philip's salary had been doubled, and his mother now being entirely self-supporting, he was enabled to lay up nearly the whole of it.

There are few human beings so constituted that they can live utterly alone or even with mere hirelings. Cold and proud as was Mr. Kanell, he had found his home intolerable after his return from Newport that autumn after Kitty's disappearance; the loneliness he suffered had induced him to ask Philip to live with him; and when the reply was that Philip could not leave his mother, it was hinted that if she would accept the situation of housekeeper it was open to her. Mrs. Armory, eager to save her son expense, at once accepted, nor had she reason to regret it, as she found herself installed mistress of a sumptuous house with nothing to do but give a few orders.

It was not a very long walk to the ferry from the Wall street bank; on the other side Mr. Kanell's carriage awaited them, and banker and clerk were soon at home.

As they sat down, at half past five, to dinner, Mr. Kanell took a couple of opera tickets from his wallet.

"I had nearly forgotten these," he said, handing them over to young Armory. "I believe there is a new troupe to sing at the New York Academy of Music to-night. They are said to have a young *prima donna* worth hearing—Madame Franca, I believe is her name. M. Franca, her husband, is the tenor. I thought of going—but I do not feel like it."

"Then I had better stay home to keep you company," answered Philip, looking affectionately into the elder gentleman's face and remarking that it wore a tired, dissatisfied look.

"No, no. I shall retire early; and that will be stupid for you. There are two tickets; go, get some pretty girl, and enjoy yourself. You can have the carriage."

An irrepressible sigh broke from the young man's breast.

"I am not acquainted with any pretty girls—nor do I care to be."

"Take your mother, then."

Mrs. Armory thanked him, but did not feel equal to going over to New York to the opera. So it was decided that Philip should go alone, not taking the carriage, but depending on the street-cars, since no lady was to accompany him.

After his dessert and coffee he ran up to his room for a white tie and a pair of light gloves, buttoned his overcoat closely about him and set off. Although it was snowing and blowing he preferred to walk to the ferry. What made him go out of his way to pass through Pineapple street? What made him linger before a certain two-story wooden house and look up at the upper windows?

Never, never, could he pass that house without living over again in imagination the week in which Kitty Kanell found refuge there. That happiest, most miserable week of his life! What charm was there about it that he should still wish to live it over?

Surely it was his duty to forget the girl whose glorious presence had illuminated his humble home, who was, even then, a married woman! Yes, it was his duty, but he had not the power to do his duty in this respect.

"I am sacrificing my life to a vain memory—to a mocking shadow!" he said to himself, bitterly, as he walked by, the snow fluttering in his upturned face. "I am doing well—have good prospects—there are hundreds of good and lovable girls, any one of whom I might win to be glad to share my growing fortunes; but I cling to the memory of that one glorious face. Ah, Kitty Kanell, it is wreck and ruin you have made of my future! Your birthday? Only eighteen to-day? I would to Heaven that I could look upon you as you are to-day, if only for one brief moment! I cannot believe that you are happy; I cannot understand your conduct. I feel, all the time, that some dreary mystery envelops your career. You told me that you loved the count. Then, how could you find happiness with his menial?" Here Philip stumbled over the curbstone and was brought rudely out of his meditations.

As he got out of the horse-cars at Fourteenth street, in New York, his eye fell on the window of a florist.

"I will buy a white rose for Kitty's sake," he said. "It is her birthday."

Going in he soon came out possessor of a perfect, half-opened creamy rose. In a few minutes more he was sitting in one of the best seats in the Academy, in the parquet, just behind the orchestra-chairs, where he had a near view of the stage, yet was not too close to the orchestra. The overture was being played. He listened to it dreamily, gazing at the white rose in his fingers. The lovely, passionate music excited his imagination—it seemed to him that the rose was the soul of the woman he loved, pure, white, passionate, sweet. He raised it to his lips, he kissed it, the delicate perfume of its velvet petals intoxicated him. One moment he was happy, when the music was; the next, stormy agonies of disappointment moved him, as the music changed to the tragic rhythm of the conclusion.

It was not often that Philip, fond as he was of music, attended an opera. The brilliant audience, the beautiful house, the delicious playing of the orchestra raised him to an exalted mood.

Presently the curtain went up on the first scene. The orchestra played a lovely waltz and a party of peasants danced in the open air. Then came on the hero of the piece, a dark, slender man with Italian eyes. He sung well—very well, indeed; but the soul-moving, passionate, pathetic quality which makes the charm of many tenor voices, was not there. His voice was clear, with a marvelous range, but it was cold—cold as the gleam of his black eyes and the curl of his thin lips.

He could not move his audience to more than a critical admiration of its culture and range. This was M. Franca.

It was not until near the close of the first act that the *prima donna* came on, singing to herself a love-song.

Philip was looking at his rose, lost in dreams; but as the first notes of the pure, thrilling, rich voice melted on his ear like liquid pearls, he raised his eyes to the singer.

She, too, was holding a rose, one which her lover had given her. She was pressing it to her lips and singing to it. She was very beautiful and very youthful. In the short peasant cos-

tume which she wore she looked a very child. Perhaps she experienced a stage-fright, for she was pale as death when she first came on; but in a moment or two, she regained her rosy bloom, an arch smile played about her mouth, her dark-blue eyes flashed mischief, she sung to the flower her noble lover had given to her, confessing to it her love for him, but declaring, with girlish coquetry, that he should never know of it.

A more lovely vision had never glided before the gaze of the most experienced opera-goers; or a fresher, sweeter, more delicious voice greeted their cultured ears.

"Here is a success, at last!" whispered some one behind Philip.

He was staring at the singer with dilated eyes; his heart throbbed madly: "could it be? No. Yes. It was!"—for the peasant girl looked straight into his questioning eyes and flashed him one full smile, as she ended her delicious song—it was Kitty. Madame Franca was Kitty Kanell.

Philip Armory sat through the three hours of the opera scarcely breathing or moving. He saw Madame and Monsieur Franca play the devoted, the despairing, the separated lovers of the play.

He saw the peasant girl in the velvet and diamonds of a duchess, sweeping the boards in all the queenly loveliness of the high estate to which she had been raised; he saw her again in peasant dress, deserted, in despair, going to her death.

The frescoed ceiling rung to the soft clapping of gloved hands and the louder applause of enthusiasts; bouquets rained upon the stage; Philip clung to his white rose, though he watched, with mute fascination, every light and shadow of the mimic scene.

"She does not love him; she abhors that man! Great Heaven, to think she should be his wife!"—these were his thoughts as he saw Kitty and her husband play the lovers. "The mystery of her being with him deepens."

He noticed that not once, during all the passionate scenes they acted together, did the tenor so much as touch the hand of the lady—yet she was his wife. It filled Philip with a fierce joy to mark the actual repulsion which neither could successfully conceal, at least from him; nor, perhaps, from others, for he heard the critic behind him remark:

"She would act better if she played with some one besides her husband. Pity there was not a Nicolini for this new Patti!"

Quickly the curtain came down on the *finale*; the audience arose; the players in the orchestra began to put up their instruments; the lights were lowered; still Philip Armory sat lost in thought.

A page touched him on the shoulder, asking him to follow him, saying:

"Madame Franca wishes to speak with you a moment."

Springing to his feet, he followed the boy around through a passage to the *prima donna's* dressing-room. There were other persons about. M. Franca stood a few feet away. A tall, dark woman, having the appearance of a servant, was carefully folding a thick shawl about the lady, who put out one cold little hand to Philip.

"You knew me; I saw it in your face."

"Yes, I knew you."

"Is there any one else in the house that I know, Mr. Armory?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Will you come to see me at the Everett tomorrow at twelve? I want to speak to you about my father."

Philip bowed his head in assent. His voice had been so hoarse and uneven when he spoke before, he was unwilling to try it again.

"Thanks. Be sure to come. It is a business matter."

She turned away, but spoke quickly again:

"Do not tell papa until after you have seen me again, that I have come back."

Philip went home, but not to sleep.

CHAPTER XX.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

Oh, to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.

—BYRON.

AFTER the death of the duchess the Count Cicarini went into mourning, and mourned for her as long, perhaps, as it is natural for a man to grieve for a dead woman. It was six months before he permitted himself to smile; three more, before he allowed himself to reflect that there was still pleasure in living; a year when he began to pick up the dropped golden threads

of a brilliant life and to appear in Venetian society again as the gay, young and lavish noble. About this time he had been in Milan, on some errand of business or pleasure, and had, for want of something better to do, gone to the Opera House to pass judgment, one evening, on a young *debutante* said to give brilliant promise. Judge of his surprise, his emotion, when he discovered that the new singer was that lovely American who had, at one time, almost reconciled him to his Laura being the wife of another! Judge, too, of his indignation, when his faithless secretary came out in the character of chief tenor. So, these two were living together! Incredible!

He kept his eyes fixed on Kitty until their magnetism drew hers to recognize him. Then he saw her turn deadly pale, then the blood surge slowly in a red wave over brow and breast to leave her whiter than before; at least, she, who had pretended to love him so well as to be willing to elope with him, had not forgotten him! Was that a blush of shame or love, or both?

The count, himself, could not see her without deep agitation. She had charmed him, once, completely; and now, she was here, lovelier than ever. Her blush seemed to call him to her.

At the end of the first act he made his way behind the scenes. Kitty stood there, pale, frozen, a marble image. He held out his hand to her—she did not take it.

"I am surprised to see you on the stage! Are you well?—are you happy?—Ah, how strange this all is!"

"Please do not speak to me, Count Cicarini," she said to him, holding out her white arms as if to keep him away. "Yet, stay! I have one request to make of you. It is—that you do not seek to punish Alberto for the crimes he did against you. He is—my husband—now."

The words dropped like icicles from her pallid lips. The count bowed low as he answered:

"For your sake, madame—for the sake of the pleasant past—I consent not to lay a straw in Alberto's way. May your life with him be happy and prosperous; I shall not disturb it."

His beautiful lips curled with scorn of a woman who could debase herself to live with that scoundrel. Kitty saw the contempt, but her lips were sealed—she could only look after him with a dilating gaze of love, horror, shame, longing, desperation: Alberto was at her elbow, his fierce eyes watched her with malignant cunning, and she had to allow the count to bow again, and pass on, haughtily, biting his lips with annoyance, out of the theater. Ah! the count did not hear that low cry of despair that broke from her struggling heart when he was gone; he did not see her fall like an overtoppled statue prone upon the floor.

Teresa had much to do to get her young mistress back to her senses, and dressed for her next entrance on the stage. Happily there was quite a scene before the *prima donna* would be called. Yet, even then, Kitty would never have moved herself to the effort had she not hoped to see the count again in his box when she went out on the stage. She did not see him, however; he had left the opera house in a passion of scorn, anger, wounded feelings. Despair did for her, then, what it has done for many another woman—kept her up to the pitch of the part she had attempted: so that the impressive yet critical Milanese wondered to see so mere a child act with such fiery vehemence, with passion and energy only to be expected of experience.

Next morning, the dark-browed servant, who had stood near her young mistress during that brief interview of the night before, came to the count's hotel with a letter; but the count had just gone off in the omnibus for the train—it would be too late if she attempted to meet him.

So, the explanation of the strange situation in which he found her, that Kitty had made and dispatched secretly by Teresa, missed of being delivered, and Kitty did not have the count's address in Venice.

After that Kitty brooded, deeply and often, over the temptation to suicide. The fear of Carlo's contempt had ever been the keenest of all her sufferings in the difficult position to which her helplessness on board the yacht had condemned her.

"All is over between him and me," she said to herself, in bitterest grief. "His pride would prevent his having anything to do with me, were I free this hour. Though he knew that villain's hand had never touched me, he would despise me for having been called his wife. Yet, I was no coward. I did the best I could. When I think of how utterly helpless I was, in the power of my tormentor, alone on the ocean

with him, legally his wife, I wonder that I was able to make terms with him! He feared that I would kill myself—he saw that I had the resolution to do it—and thus he would lose the rich plunder his avarice courted, so he entered into bonds with me. Ay, I hold him to his terms! But Carlo cannot know that. Carlo despises me. Alberto dares to sneer at my ‘hopeless love’—to taunt me with my love for the count! I shall lose my reason, some day. How horribly have I been punished for that waywardness which I thought so brave!”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SUN SHINES THROUGH A CLOUD.

Do I hear her sing as of old,
My bird with the shining head,
My own dove with the tender eye?
But there rings on a sudden a passionate cry—
There is some one dying or dead.—TENNYSON.

WHEN Philip Armory sent up his card from one of the parlors of the Everett House, the morning following his visit to the opera, to Madame Franca, only the dark-faced servant came down to him.

“Madame cannot see you this morning Mr. Armory. She is in—affliction. There has been—sudden illness—and death. Monsieur Franca—is dead. He died—of pneumonia, about—an hour ago. Madame begs you will call again this evening; and—requests that you do not speak of her—to any one.”

The woman was evidently intensely excited, yet making a great effort to restrain herself. She spoke with curious hesitation; a deep light glittered in her eyes, it would almost seem as if for very joy.

As for Philip, he could not, at first, speak at all. He was utterly confounded by this news.

That fierce, dark man who had sung with her last night, dead? Kitty, a widow! Free! His heart gave a wild leap of exultation—then sunk coldly down again half-appalled at its own selfishness. Kitty in trouble! That was the way to think of it—Kitty mourning her dead!

It was fully two minutes before he answered the messenger:

“Can I, then, be of no help?”

She shook her head.

“My mistress cannot see any one. She is in hysterics—I must go back to her, at once.”

“I will be here, then, this evening at eight.”

Philip, when he returned to the bank, pleaded illness and was excused from work. He would have made sad mistakes had he attempted any arithmetic that day. Going home, he shut himself up in his room, giving to his mother that convenient excuse—headache.

Meantime, at the hotel, there was considerable excitement over the death of M. Franca. The manager of the troupe was, of course, very much put out about it; it was inconvenient for him. He would lose his prima-donna, too; for she had already sent him word that she should never sing on the stage again.

Much sympathy was felt for the young and lovely *cantatrice*, who exhibited all the symptoms of profound grief.

The truth was that Kitty's nerves had, for a year and a half, been under such a constant and terrible strain, that, when this sudden, unexpected relief came—and, added to that, the shock of knowing her persecutor dead—she lost, for hours, all control of herself, going from one spasm of hysteria into another, until nature was utterly exhausted and she fell into a deep and deathlike sleep.

She had awakened from the refreshing sleep, had a cup of tea, and Teresa had combed out the tangles of her long, silken hair and thrown about her young mistress a richly-embroidered white cashmere dressing-gown, when Mr. Armory's card came up again.

“Help me out into my sitting-room, Teresa; then, bring him in, and do you sit outside the door and see that we are not interrupted.”

Philip trembled so that he could hardly stand when he found himself clasping the marble hand which Kitty held out to him.

She had done with weeping, now; done with nervous shiverings and screamings. She stood before him pale, calm and lovely as some moon-lit lily.

“Mr. Armory, it is kind of you to come. I did not feel that I could bear the excitement of meeting my father to-day. I want you to tell him first that I am here; and tell him some other things, too, which it is important he should hear. You may think strange that I choose you for my messenger, but I know you are a true friend of mine. How are Miss Bayard and Mr. Fenn—are they married?”

“Married, and very happy, I believe. The

only trouble they have in the world is the anxiety they feel about you, I have been told.”

He wondered to find her so tranquil, speaking in an ordinary tone.

“A great good fortune has befallen me to-day, Mr. Armory. I thank God for it! I thank him that the man who lies in yonder room is dead. Oh, I am free again—I can breathe once more!” stretching her round white arms up with a passionate gesture. “You are surprised? Listen! that abhorrent man, who lies there dead, never was my husband. It is true, he cheated me into a ceremony, which, under the circumstances, could have no validity in the eyes of God or man. That night of the *fête* in Newport I was seized by him and his creatures, forced into a boat, placed on board his yacht, and carried off to sea. I was a helpless girl alone with that villain. All on board were hired to second his interests. He claimed me as his wife—said that he had the legal right to seize me and compel me to accompany him. I will tell you how, in my despair, I yet refused to yield to the odds against me—how I forced a compromise from him. Sit down.”

Both had stood, in the profound agitation of the meeting; she motioned him to sit at the other end of the sofa on which she now sunk down, and, with flushing cheeks and sparkling eyes, and sweet, clear voice thrilling with the vibrant ring of truth, she gave the singular story of her partnership with Alberto.

“I bought him,” she said, triumphantly. “It was my money he wanted—not me! Avarice was his strongest passion, and I led him by it. Teresa will swear to you that I never was alone one moment with that scoundrel. Yet there was nothing for me to do, but to pass as his wife. I was in his power, and I had to make the best bargain I could. Mr. Armory, do you think papa will blame me? Do you think I could have done otherwise than as I did, and preserve my good name? Will you go to my father and tell him that his little Kitty has come back to him as pure as when she went away?—as much his own little Kitty as ever. That she wants to come back to him and try how good she can be—a better girl than the willful, troublesome Kitty of the old days.”

She was looking at him coaxingly, with the little mouth pursed up and the blue eyes full of smiles and tears.

With the death of her tormentor it seemed to Kitty that her heart, soul and body sprung up elastic, as from under a crushing spell; the long year and a half of terror—during which she would have gone mad had not music afforded her an employment by means of which she might forget herself at times—was almost as if it had never been. Philip watched her, entranced, fascinated, admiring, more than words can tell, the wonderful courage and spirit which had brought her out of that dark period of her life triumphant.

“You are a brave girl,” he said, warmly; “a real heroine.”

“Am I not? Yes, I would rather fight Indians than be again on that vessel, a prisoner as I was. Yes, I am a chip of the old block, Mr. Armory—you know my great-grandmother fought in the Revolution, in boy's clothes. That would be lots more fun than the kind of mental warfare I had to carry on.”

Truly this was Kitty Kanell, sitting on the sofa, talking to him! Philip felt the old spell of her playful witchery creeping over him. There were “none like her—none!”

“Thank God, you are safe,” fervently.

“I do thank God,” answered Kitty, with sudden, sweet solemnity. “Do not think me heartless, Mr. Armory, because I can be almost gay in the presence of sudden death. If you could only imagine half what I have suffered!” with a shudder. “Why! only last evening, when I saw you in the parquette looking at me with those reproachful eyes, I was the most miserable girl on the face of the earth. If Alberto had lived, I should have kept the secret of my life with him, for he had my promise. My only hope, yesterday, was that he would squander my fortune quickly, and then, when he had gotten the last dollar, let me go. Now, to-day, I am free! I am Kitty Kanell again! My heart sings in my breast. I cannot help it. I shall be with my father—I shall see Lilia and Florian—I shall go wild with joy! You will tell papa all about it to-night; to-morrow he will come for me!”

Philip said “yes;” but he said it with a sigh. He had no part in this joy of Kitty's; he was only a convenience to her; she had sent for him because he was the first acquaintance who presented himself on her return.

“Go now, Mr. Armory,” cried Kitty, with all her old impulsiveness. “Fly! tell papa all. He will be so glad to hear. Tell him to come for me early. I want to breakfast with him! I shall be up and waiting. I shall be awfully grateful to you. Where do you live now? How is your dear, kind mother?”

“She is your father's housekeeper. You will see her in the morning.”

She did not notice the bitterness in the poor clerk's tone.

“I am so glad! How nice it is for my father to have such a lady in place of Miss Parseley. Kiss your dear mother for me, Mr. Armory. And now, please, go. I shall imagine the scene, while you are telling papa. It will take you an hour to reach him—it is half-past eight now—at half-past nine you will stand in his august presence and say: ‘Kitty wants to come home! Kitty is waiting for her papa to come for her!’”

She burst into a silvery laugh of pure joy. The echo of that laugh crept into the adjoining room where Alberto lay still under a white pall—he could not rouse himself and put down that laugh with a cruel look out of his wicked eyes.

Poor girl! He had made her suffer agonies prolonged. It was but retribution that she should laugh that he was dead.

After Philip went away, Kitty said to her servant:

“Undress me quickly, Teresa; I am tired and sleepy. Ah, Heaven! how sweet it is to dare to sleep soundly once more. Teresa, are you glad for me or sorry for him?”

“I am glad for madame,” answered Teresa, quietly; and so she was.

At first her interest had been for her employer; but Kitty had long since won the hard woman's heart, who had been a watchful and faithful servant to her. It would have been dangerous for Alberto to have attempted to break over his promise, with that dragon guarding her sweet young mistress.

“Dear soul, how like an infant she sleeps!” murmured Teresa, as, in a few moments after she had tucked her in bed, Kitty went off into childish dreams, with smiling, parted lips and rosy cheeks kissed by curling tendrils of silky hair.

There were hired watchers for the dead; so the woman devoted herself to her mistress, snatching a little rest from time to time, as she sat in an arm-chair all night by Kitty's bed.

Philip was both happy and miserable as he made his way back to Brooklyn to tell the banker his daughter's strange story.

He was happy to think Kitty was safe and free; he was wretched to think he had “no part or lot” in her fortunes—that she loved all her friends but him.

“I must leave Mr. Kanell's, of course. My mother and I must find a little house, somewhere,” he mused. “Delicacy forbids that I should intrude upon her, after the declaration of my feelings which I made in Newport.”

That night he and Mr. Kanell had a long and stormy interview; the result of the story which Philip had to tell.

Kitty arose early, and had Teresa dress her carefully; then she sat down by the window to watch.

“I am going to take breakfast at home, Teresa,” she kept repeating to her maid every few moments.

“I will bring madame a cup of coffee here, before she goes out in the cold,” and Teresa did so.

While Kitty was drinking it there was a knock at the door; she set down her cup and ran to open it herself, ready to throw herself into her father's arms; but it was not Mr. Kanell who stood there—only Philip Armory.

“Where is my father?”

“He did not come.”

Looking in Philip's embarrassed countenance, she gathered the truth.

“He has cast me off! I am not to go to him!”

“He is up in arms about your going on the stage. The Kanell pride has received a blow.”

“What else could I have done, Mr. Armory? If it had not been for my singing I should have lost my senses. What could I have done other than I did do, situated as I was? Papa is hard and unreasonable. He is perfectly heartless. He loves his dignity better than he loves his daughter. Well! he shall never be troubled by me again. Tell him so, Mr. Armory. Tell him that his child will make her own way in the world. Why, Teresa, here, loves me more than he does! Very well, if I make his hard heart ache with real sorrow, some day, he will have only himself to blame.”

“I do not think Mr. Kanell gives full credit

to your story. At all events, he is vexed and irritated beyond the point where he can be reasonable. I am very sorry. I am afraid he thinks me an impertinent meddler, for I spoke very plainly to him last night. I assure you, it was not easy for me to come here with his message."

"What was his message?"

"That you are a stranger to him."

"He never did love me," said Kitty, with quivering lips. "He never really loved any one but himself—not even my poor mamma."

Then the Kanell blood leaped into her cheek and its pride into her eyes.

"He shall never be troubled with word from me again. I am eighteen—my own mistress. I have plenty of money of my own—thank Heaven, I am not indebted to him, even for that!—and the world is all before me where to choose. Tell him he has driven me back upon the stage—that he is worse than the dead villain lying in yonder room. Tell him that I will come to Brooklyn and sing in the Academy there, on purpose to please him. Tell him"—stamping her little foot passionately, her resentment growing as she went—"that I will take care to sing there as Kitty Kanell! I never was the wife of that dead man; and he had no name to give me, if I had been his wife. I am Kitty Kanell still; and as Kitty Kanell I will triumph over my unlucky star."

"I wish you would place yourself under my mother's care," ventured Philip, fascinated and yet alarmed by this display of spirit. "You are too young and—and beautiful—to get on without a chaperon. Especially as—"

"As cruel accident has compromised me," you would kindly say. Thank you, Mr. Armory. I like your mother, and may ask her to share my fortunes. Do not be too uneasy about my future. I see apprehension written on your face! With youth and beauty and money I am not afraid of being put down! I am going to have my own way now. There is something better in life than being cooped up"—forgive Kitty this naughty expression—"with a cross father in a gloomy old house. Tell him so, with my compliments, please. And now, Teresa, I will have breakfast here as soon as possible. Mr. Armory, will you breakfast with me? No? Then I regret your decision! Good-by."

CHAPTER XXII.

TO CLAIM THE DEAD.

"She has opened the door, and there comes through it slowly
A woman as pale as a dame on a tombstone."

"Still his heart thrills to hear her name
Upon a stranger's lip."

"YOU know I have money enough," said Kitty. "If I sing, it is out of spite."

"What good does it do you to be so spiteful, may I ask?"

"It amuses me. There is something fascinating about it."

"You like to make yourself out worse than you are. Come, Kitty, I have a proposition to make! Florian and I have a jolly little house, with a spare room or two. Come and live with us! If anything could make us more perfectly happy than we are now, it would be such an arrangement."

"Thank you a thousand times, Lilia, dear, but, liberty is sweet."

"Ain't you afraid?" asked Mrs. Fenn, in an awed tone.

"Not with Teresa. All I think of nowadays is that I am free—free! Free as air—free as a bird—free as this! If you had been such a prisoner as I have been for a year and a half, Lilia, you would crave no other joy but freedom."

"Is your heart free, Kitty?" Lilia asked, significantly.

Kitty "suddenly, sweetly, strangely blushed."

"I shall try hard to file off all chains," she laughed. "Carlo's love was not worth the having—let him go."

"I wonder your father can leave such a wild little thing as you to take care of yourself. I should think his home would be dull enough without you, my dear."

"Oh, papa is another Dombey," said Kitty, bitterly. "His daughter is of no account. He has a son, now—a real good boy, who I hope will satisfy him."

"What do you mean?"

"A son, by adoption: one of your prigs who wouldn't do anything naughty for the world. A Mr. Philip Armory, his confidential clerk in the bank, who aspired—let me tell you in con-

fidence, Lilia—to be a son-in-law, but is fain to be content with being a hanger-on."

"I have seen him. He is one of the finest-looking men I ever saw—of good family, too. His father, Archer Armory, used to be as rich as yours; but he failed during the panic. I like him ever so much. Can't you make up your mind to return his passion, Kitty?"

"I do not think I shall ever love anybody again," lightly. "I am going in, now, for conquest—not to be conquered. I expect to have the Prince of Wales and the Emperor of Russia at my feet within two years."

"I don't like it. I won't have it! You must give up all this and come and live with me, Kitty. I am married, you see, and can act as your chaperon. You must be very quiet and discreet, and all will end well."

"Oh yes, I will be a most interesting object to all my friends. I will be the one kind enough to furnish society with a subject for limitless gossip—not to say, scandal. I don't believe you know what you ask to undertake, Lily, dear. There is a spark of the Kanell pride in me which prevents my becoming a source of annoyance to my friends."

"What utter nonsense, Kitty! What are friends for if not to stand by in trouble? Florian and I will be only too proud and honored to have you with us. And then, as Florian says, you would never have been in this dreadful scrape but for him. It was Florian who gave the impostor the information which enabled him to carry out his part. It is an awful weight on his conscience! Not a day of his life but he bemoans his folly."

The two ladies were seated in Kitty's parlor at the hotel. Neither of them knew it, but it was Philip's interference which had brought them together. Alarmed at Kitty's angry and rebellious state, he had contrived to send information to Mrs. Fenn that the Madame Franca at the Everett House was her old friend, Kitty Kanell.

Lilia had rushed over at once, and the two friends had had a long conversation. Lilia's warm sympathy had done poor Kitty more good than could be told.

"Tell Florian, from me, that I forgive him."

"Kitty, do you know, you are a hundred times prettier than ever?"

"I hope so," meekly. "If one is to be an opera-singer she needs all the good looks she can command."

"You will bewitch your audience if you look out at it from under those curling lashes as you are looking at me."

"Am I frightfully old?" asked Kitty.

"Oh, yes. Eighteen is a hideous age!"

"Really, it seems an—" whatever Kitty was about to say was interrupted by a knock at the door followed by the entrance of Teresa, saying:

"Madame, there is a person who insists on intruding."

"A person?"

"A person, madame. A young woman—an Italian."

"Let her come in. Probably some one who wants me to use my influence to get her a place in the ballet," to Lilia. Then, to the haggard, wild-eyed, but beautiful and girlish creature who had followed Teresa into the room—"What can I do for you?"

The stranger advanced quite close to her. The look in those large liquid eyes of intensest black quite startled the lady; they roved over her face, her person, the jeweled rings on her fingers.

"I want my husband," was the answer, in Italian.

"Your husband?" Kitty answered her in the same language—of which Alberto, along with his lessons in singing, had given her a thorough knowledge.

"Yes, my husband, Alberto Mancro."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Ah! you are very innocent, are you not?" cried the stranger, with rising passion. "You think yourself Alberto's wife! Nay, madame, with all your wealth, your splendid beauty and pride, you are only a thing of contempt to me, who am his true wife—who have my marriage-certificate in my bosom! Yet, I dare say, he deceived you. He was capable of it! Where is he? Let me confront him. Lady, look at his face when his eyes first fall on me. You will see written there his fear—his guilt."

"Who is this Alberto of whom you speak? Do you mean he who was once secretary and business-agent of the Count Cicarini?"

"The same, madame. Alberto Mancro, now singing in opera as Monsieur Franca. I got trace of him in Milan, and I have followed him. You think yourself his wife! Look at that!"

One brown, slender hand tore something from the bosom of her poor dress and extended it to

the silken-attired lady, who took it eagerly and read on the yellow slip of paper the marriage-certificate, dated three years ago at Venice, of Alberto Mancro and Isola Guiseppe.

Kitty's eyes sparkled as she glanced over it.

"I would have given you a thousand dollars for that only one week ago," she said, handing it back.

"I do not understand. Is madame glad?" stammered the stranger.

"Wild with joy," was the startling answer.

"Wild with joy to know to a dead certainty that that scoundrel had never for an instant the right to call me wife! Oh, if I had known then," she concluded, in her own tongue, "how much misery it would have saved me. Yet, thank God, it is no worse!" and she rapidly explained to Lilia what was going on. "Now I can truly and honestly take back my own sweet name. Oh, Lilia, call me Kitty Kanell quick! Let me hear how it sounds!"

"You are Miss Kitty Kanell yet, I see," obeyed Mrs. Fenn, laughing.

"And you are an angel!" cried Kitty, getting up to kiss her.

Suddenly a thought brought back her serious manner: if this poor, deserted woman loved this wicked husband of hers, there was a sorrow in store for her that called out the girl's quick sympathy.

"Teresa, take her in my bedroom and tell her all."

The servant, who had waited by the door, took the stranger by the hand, and speaking gently to her, drew her into the sleeping-room, from which, before long, issued a cry of distress which assured Kitty she knew the worst. Teresa probably said a great deal about the past, for she was closeted with Mrs. Mancro nearly an hour; and when she came out with her the Italian went very gravely up to Kitty and kissed her hand.

"Sit down, my poor Isola, and let Teresa bring you some lunch. After you have eaten something, you will have courage, perhaps, to tell me more of yourself. You are my protégé while you remain in this country. I shall insist upon taking care of you."

"I spent my last penny yesterday, and I have nothing to do but obey," was the answer.

Indeed, the young woman, who could have been but a year or two older than Kitty, had the pinched look of starvation. After she had lunched, a very pretty color came into her olive cheeks and her soft, large eyes lost their fierce expression. Not without a flood of tears she told her story to this other girl, whose lovely face, two hours ago, she had longed to scratch in her jealous fury.

Isola was a lace-maker and tapestry-mender of Venice, upon whose unusual beauty Alberto had first made his comments, while on a visit with his employer, the count, to look at some of the rare and priceless old tapestries which Isola was mending.

He paid the girl a few compliments that day; the following he contrived to see her again; on Sunday he took her out in the country to make the acquaintance of his mother; and, in less than two months, they were married. But secretly, Alberto explained that the count would be angry, and discharge him, if he learned that his agent had fettered himself to a wife.

Isola was perfectly happy, so that her husband was suited; and Alberto was the most devoted of lovers for nearly a year; coming to see her whenever it was prudent to do so. Then came a great cloud over her happiness when she learned that her husband must accompany the count on a long journey to a foreign country; but, she resolved to bear with it patiently, and did so for months, until she became terribly uneasy about never having a letter from Alberto. She dwelt on her heart-sickness until the return of Count Cicarini to Venice, when she sought him out and demanded information of Alberto, confessing that she was his wife.

The count had seemed greatly perplexed and disturbed to learn that Alberto was married; disclaimed all knowledge of his present whereabouts, said that he had discharged him, and that Alberto was a bad man. She told how she had heard, by the merest chance, of his having been in Milan. Some friend of hers had heard him sing, under the assumed name of Franca, and believed he had another wife, who sung with him. So, Isola, wild with jealousy, had raised what little money she could—the count had given her the greater part of it—and had followed on from place to place, crossing the ocean at last in search of the recreant.

"Think no more of him, my poor child," advised Kitty, when all was told. "He was not worth your breaking your heart about. It is

well for you that he is in his grave. You must begin your life all over—as I have to begin mine. I will see that you do not suffer want; and establish you in some pleasant business."

Then Kitty gave Teresa the keys of Alberto's trunks, telling her to go over them with Isola, and, after removing what might rightly be considered Kitty's own property, to give the remainder to the widow. As for her, if the things had never been opened, she would not have touched them.

Teresa soon brought to her mistress an ebony box, inlaid with ivory, fastening by a curious lock, which she suspected to be her master's money-box—she had found the key in his pocket-book.

"Unlock it for me, Teresa."

The woman did so, disclosing a number of certificates of deposit in the Bank of London to the amount of twenty thousand dollars or more; and the remainder of the jewels which he had taken from Kitty on shipboard, along with a miniature of Isola and a few letters and trifles.

The sight of this miniature confirmed Isola's story.

Of course the jewels and money were Kitty's, and she retained them—the box she gave to Isola; who wept and moaned over it, and at the sight of that picture of herself which had been painted for her husband during their honeymoon.

The following day Teresa received orders to procure a suitable outfit for the sad young creature; she was then given a few days for rest and recovery, her passage paid on a French steamer, and her future made secure by a present of a thousand pounds from her benefactress with which to go into business when she reached home.

That she reached Venice safely Kitty was afterward assured by a grateful letter, in which Isola poured out her passionate thanks and affection; but in which she failed to mention that she had been to the house of the Count Cicarini and had a long interview with him.

It may be that Teresa had babbled to Isola more of the affairs of her young mistress than Kitty could have dreamed of; at least, the story she told the young count brought the light to his eye and the flush to his cheek, brighter and warmer than they had been seen there for many a day.

He, too, became a warm friend of Isola's, coming often to her shop, where, perchance, while he looked over her coral and amber and filagree-work, making some trifling purchase, he might hear from her pretty red lips the name of the generous, the beautiful American with whom he had once imagined himself desperately in love.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FATAL LETTER.

"A lovely princess in a lovely house."

I will work him

To an exploit, now ripe in my device
Under the which he shall not choose but fall
And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe.
—SHAKESPEARE.

THE combined and persistent pleadings and warnings of Lilia and Florian at last had the desired effect—Kitty consented to give up her plan of going on the stage.

She had a will of her own as to other matters, and she carried it out with a spirit that was irresistible.

Behold her, then, ere she had been a month free, the owner of a gem of a house adjoining that of the Fenns. This house was furnished with sumptuous luxury. Kitty, to all her other glaring faults, added that of extravagance! Sole mistress of nearly half a million, she saw no reason why her home should not be just as she wanted it. It was not her extravagance, however, that Florian objected to. He thought she ought to wear mourning and adopt the hideous name of Mancro, in order to avoid gossip.

As a beautiful and wealthy young widow Kitty would have a right to keep house away from her father. While nothing could be more shocking than her coming back from that mysterious absence as Miss Kanell; nothing more outraging to that fine sense of propriety which makes society what it is, than her venturing upon an establishment of her own in one street, while near at hand, on another, her father was obliged to salary a lady to keep house for him.

Subject for scandal, indeed! that would make Brooklyn Heights ring. Lilia looked on with awe and trembling, but she was faithful to her friend, defending her on every side and stoutly maintaining that she was in Miss Kanell's confidence and everything was right that she had done.

"Wear that dastard's name!" Kitty had cried, when Florian suggested it. "I would

sooner be branded, as the slaves used sometimes to be! Thank God, I have right to be a Kanell still! I cannot be grateful enough for that. Wear mourning for one who made my days a long fear and agony! Ah, Florian, I am not hypocrite enough for that! I am afraid the angels would blush for me if they saw me wearing a black dress for Alberto! No, no, no, my dear, good friends, let me do as a pure heart and an honest conscience prompt me. Then if the world finds fault, I must get along without its good opinion. Your poor little Kitty will never be without friends to love her, I know."

"You always would have your own way, Kitty," and she had it. In an incredibly short time Kitty had around her a large circle of admirers, youthful devotees of either sex. The girls were quite as infatuated with her as the boys. To be invited to her breakfasts, luncheons, musical evenings, and other frequent and fascinating entertainments, was to be happy.

Perhaps Miss Kanell's taste was a trifle bizarre—for at eighteen one's fancy is a shade too brilliant—but nothing, except its young mistress, could be prettier in its way than her drawing-room, all white and gold. Kitty loved to wear blue, and she thought her pale blue dresses looked best against such a background. An Aubusson carpet of white, with delicate chains of gold-color running through it; furniture of ebony and gilt with gold-colored covering of the richest satin—curtains of the same that held the light like melting topazes—plenty of flowers when flowers were the costliest; plenty of light, plenty of easy-chairs, and a delightful disorder of bric-a-brac, made that room a tempting place even without the supreme attraction of its high-spirited mistress. Beyond it was a boudoir furnished with the richest Japanese curios. The table in the small dining-room was always set for guests—six plates laid regularly, whether any one was expected or not. There was always hot-house fruit on the sideboard: ices and dainty confections came in every evening at ten.

Teresa, solemn and mysterious as the Sphinx, invariably dressed in black silk and holding a piece of embroidery, was always in view. Kitty had constituted her her duenna.

Eliza had been looked up, and came joyfully back to her young mistress, reigning contentedly in the upper regions.

There was a French *cordon-bleu* of the female sex in the kitchen; a boy in buttons in the dining-room and hall, and a coachman, who slept over the stable and took excellent care of Miss Kanell's spirited black span.

"I ought to be awfully jolly; oughtn't I, Eliza?" Miss Kanell asked, one day, when her *ménage* was all in working order, the wheels of life running smoothly. "This dress is just perfect. Do you see how dark it makes my eyes look? There's a lot of my young friends coming in for a little dance this evening. They will rave over my dress and over me, I suppose; but, somehow, I don't seem to care how I look," and she turned away from the mirror with a sigh.

"Don't care how you look!" cried Eliza, in alarm. "Then I'm afraid you're not well, Miss Kanell. It's far from natural for a beautiful young lady in a new dress not to care. Maybe you'd best let me go at wanst for your old family doctor, Miss Kanell. There's trouble somewhere."

"To be sure there is, Eliza, you silly goose! But the doctor cannot cure it," and Kitty flung herself down in an easy-chair with another sigh.

Eliza stole a sly look at her beautiful young mistress.

"It's the home-sickness is on ye, be sure, Miss Kitty, an' no wonther, wid yer own fayther behaving so unnatural to his own flesh an' blood. All the fine dresses an' the gay company in the world ain't a-going to make up to ye for the loneliness o' livin' widout a crature ye can call yer own. Now, Miss Kitty, forgive me intruding my advice, but there's only wan thing ye can do, as will make ye independant an' cure the trouble of which ye shpake; that is—"

"To get married. No, thank you, Eliza. At least, not until the right man comes along."

"An' why don't he come, Miss Kitty? Has he forgotten the Rose of Ameriky? Maybe he does not know that ye are free. I would send him a postal-card all the way to Italy; I would, if I were you. What's the sinse of standin' on ceremony, an' yer two hearts a-breakin' for each other?"

"Oh, hush, Eliza!" and a warm blush blossomed in Kitty's cheeks; "there will never in the world be anything again between the count and me. He misjudges me, nor can I blame him for it," and the weary sigh heaved her bosom again.

"Bad cess to him, thin, for an idiot! Why think of him any more thin, Miss Kitty? Give him up as a bad job. Don't lose any shlap for him. Sure there's those as would wade through fire an' water to touch yer white hand, my dear."

"Is there?" asked Kitty, languidly. "Who?" and half closing her eyes she looked sleepily through her long curling lashes at her maid.

"Och, you know well enough, Miss Kitty."

"Upon my word, Eliza. I've plenty of admirers—or, at least my money has. They might wade through fire for my money, perhaps; but, alas! they are not lovers after my own heart. I don't think I shall ever marry, after what has happened, Eliza."

"Thin, it's plain as the nose on my face that you love him yet, Miss Kitty. He was a splendid gentleman, the count was—handsome as a picture an' polite as ever could be; yet, 'there's as good fish in the sea as ever were caught.' That's a thrue saying. There's the gentleman from New York; any one can see he is up to his ears in love wid you, Miss Kitty."

"Mr. Radcliffe? I don't exactly like him, Eliza. The other girls think he is scrum—they rave about him; but I, somehow, feel as if there was something wrong about him."

"That's a pity, miss," said the maid, gravely—she admired Mr. Radcliffe intensely, for he had paid her many a sly compliment and given her a gold brooch into the bargain. "I do believe he would go hang himself if he heard you say that. If you don't fancy him, there is another who has worshipped the ground your little shoes has trod on, all through from beginning to end."

"Yes, and I wish he would stop coming here every evening!" cried Kitty, pettishly, sitting up on the lounge and patting the carpet impatiently with a very small slipper. "If he had any pride or self-respect he would not do it, when he knows I don't care a pin for him! It's contemptible for him to persecute me with his weebegone looks. Some day I shall give Dixie orders to shut the door in his face, there, now! Is that the dinner-bell? Then I must go down. Where is my handkerchief, Eliza? Be sure you sit on the stairs and watch us dance, this evening. Be very attentive to my young lady guests, Eliza. Put on their slippers and button their gloves for them. Have you provided powder, Eliza?—I never use it, you know. Oh, joy! there are the Fenns coming in to dine with me! Now I shall have some appetite."

Naughty Kitty! Her conscience was waspish as she ran down to hug Lilia, and shake hands with Florian. It stung her so keenly that she winced. She knew that Philip Armory came and came, evening after evening, not from any want of self-respect, but because his love was so masterful that it would have its own way. Only to look and long—to see the veriest butterflies of society singeing their wings in the bewildering fire of this new light—to hear her sing—to catch a little of the reflected glory of her careless smile—for this Philip lived. She knew that he was her true friend—that he would do her bidding, fetch and carry at the motion of her lily hand—yet she had spoken to her servant of him in this scornful manner.

Another visitor was announced as they were about to sit down to table—the Mr. Radcliffe to whom Eliza had referred. Miss Kanell sent an invitation to share her dinner, an invitation he was not too modest to accept. He had been introduced to the Fenns before; so the quartette made a merry little dinner-party, and Mr. Radcliffe was asked to stay and join in the dancing to come off that evening.

Can a girl, pretty, young, rich and unprotected, be safe from the hunter, in any society? Patton Radcliffe was not the only one already in full chase after Kitty's fortune. Dangers lay about her on every side. Every adventurer who heard of her sought to make her acquaintance. Fashionably dressed exquisites, without a dollar they could honestly call their own, walked past her windows or followed her when she went out to walk, on the alert to pick up her handkerchief or glove, or, by some accident, obtain a glance from her.

Radcliffe was the most desperate of these adventurers. It was a question of bread with him. Ten years devoted to assiduous toil had failed to run down an heiress. He had made the acquaintance of Miss Kanell while she was still at the hotel, through an introduction brought about by the manager of the opera troupe. Radcliffe affected actresses, enjoying the friendship of many of them, and had asked to know Kitty.

A hint given him as to who she was, and her large fortune, had filled him with busv hopes

and plans. He had made it the business of the winter to render himself agreeable to Miss Kanell.

Florian, though a warm friend of Kitty's, was young and thoughtless. He liked Patton Radcliffe extremely well, and he took no trouble to inquire into his antecedents.

Not so Philip Armory. Jealousy made him clear-sighted. He did not like Radcliffe. Feeling keenly the sad need which Miss Kanell had of her harsh father's protection—loving her purely and nobly—he resolved to constitute himself her secret protector, to look quietly into the credentials of all who claimed the honor of her acquaintance. He learned some damaging facts about the past history of this man; who was only able to keep up an appearance and to claim the friendship of a good many notable people through some political association with them. Living on the interest of his debts, he looked to an office or a wife to better his financial condition. A smooth talker, an accomplished woman-flatterer, of suave manners, and long-practiced art, might not such a man sooner impress a bright, ambitious girl like Kitty, than younger and shallower lovers?

Poor Philip! Every day he asked himself that question. Once he had attempted to warn Miss Kanell; who, in return for his kindness, flashed out on him some witty epigram which showed him she regarded his interference as the work of jealousy, and despised him for slandering a rival.

Ah, Kitty, Kitty, the perils thicken around your wayward feet!

It is not you who are to blame for it. That cold, self-sufficient parent who has seen fit to refuse the white dove the shelter of his home will have to answer if any further harm befalls you. Yet that will make it none the less sad if the bright life is marred.

Philip was there, the evening of the dance, as usual, keeping his corner, his grave, noble face in striking contrast to the beaming foolishness of most of the young fry. Patton Radcliffe was master of the art of waltzing and claimed Kitty again and again and again.

It nearly maddened Philip to see that pure girl in the close clasp of such a man; and Kitty, seeing his moody looks, laughed out blithely—as she floated past like the airy sprite of some white, glistening thistle-down—and said something which he only half-caught, about his being sullen because he could not dance.

When the waltz was ended, the two came to a pause opposite Philip. His calm gaze met a covert sneer from Radcliffe, which made his blood boil, though he controlled himself so as not even to change color. Miss Kanell dropped her handkerchief. Her companion stooped and recovered it; as he did so, a letter slipped out of his pocket and slid down onto Kitty's silken train, without his noticing his loss; they sauntered away, and the letter was cast at Armory's feet.

At first Philip thought he would not even take it up to restore it; but let it lie there. He was a gentleman, however, and finally picked it up to hand back to the lover, when he came that way again.

By accident he saw the address—"Miss Kitty Kanell." This, then, was, probably, an offer of marriage. Why else should the man write when there was nothing to prevent his speaking?

He glanced again at the envelope, half-ashamed of allowing himself to do so. This second glance, to his deep surprise, assured him that the letter was a foreign one, bearing the post-marks of Venice and London, as well as New York. He turned it over and remarked that the seal had not been broken—it was of blue wax and was stamped with the device of some noble house.

Philip inferred, at once, that it was from Count Cicarini.

His first sensation was one of sharp pain, as if he had received an unexpected dagger-thrust in his breast—for Philip knew that if the count came again in the field, his chance of wearing the lady's favor was smaller than ever.

His next sensation was one of wonder, followed by distrust, darker than he had before felt, of Patton Radcliffe.

What was Radcliffe doing with this unopened letter of Miss Kanell's?

Should he return the letter to the one who dropped it, or to the one to whom it was addressed?

After all—and this was the most natural and sensible explanation—had not Kitty resealed her letter from the count and given it to Radcliffe to read at his leisure? This view of the subject left Philip nothing to do but return the letter to him who lost it.

That Miss Kanell should give another person

her correspondence from a man to whom she had once been engaged, argued an intimacy and confidence that could only mean that she intended to marry this person.

Very quiet and cold was Armory when he handed the letter back to Mr. Patton Radcliffe. If ever a human being showed dismay and confusion in his countenance, it was Mr. Radcliffe.

He never said a word—not even "thanks"—nor looked Philip in the eye, nor asked him *why* he returned this missive to *him* instead of Miss Kanell; but stood like one dazed, slowly paling to a green and sickly hue.

Noting this, Philip immediately regretted that he had given Kitty's letter to him. He could not ask it back; all he could do to retrieve his error—if error it was—was to inform the young lady that Radcliffe had it in his possession.

Some way, he could get no opportunity to speak to her alone; that man kept by her side every moment, until all the guests were gone but these two, and Teresa came in from the Japanese boudoir with an air that said it was time they, too, were taking leave of their young hostess.

So Philip took his leave, going away unwillingly from that warm and fragrant room, with its glorious young mistress, out into the dark and rainy February night—going to a doom of which he never dreamed—walking on straight to a darker night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LOVER WHO WILL NOT BE DENIED.

Oh, there's nothing half so sweet in life
As Love's young dream. —MOORE.

But she said, "I care not for you,
Care not for your belts of wampum,
Care not for your paint and feathers,
Care not for your jests and laughter."
—LONGFELLOW.

KITTY sat in a wonderful embroidered chair in her fanciful boudoir, her pretty, graceful head thrown back, her blue eyes looking dreamily at the bright-plumaged birds of the fantastic ceiling. There was something very, very important on her mind. Her arms hung listlessly down at her side; her lovely mouth had a pathetic droop at its delicious corners. Some rare emotion had brought the dew to those violet eyes, the pink to those fair cheeks. She looked half-sad, half-glad—altogether beautiful.

Kitty was thinking whether or not she had better marry Patton Radcliffe.

It was the morning after her little dance, and he had been there and urged his suit with all the fire and force, the simulated passion, the art and flattery, of which he was master. Does it prove that Kitty was fickle, or false, or foolish, that she debated the question in her mind, with an inclination toward saying "yes?"

Think of the circumstances in which she was placed!

She did not love this urgent suitor of hers—he and she both knew that. Yet, as he assured her she would, might it not be that she could *learn* to love him?

Ah! Kitty Kanell had never felt a single heart-throb of love save for one man alone—one man, the ideal of her young heart—one man, the image to her of all that was gracious, grand, glorious, perfect—one man, beautiful and noble—Count Carlo Cicarini. Since the thrilling, surreptitious bliss of that first evening passed in his company she had loved him with all the wild fervor of her willful nature. He had professed to love her. They had been betrothed. A cruel, wicked fraud had placed her in the power of a scoundrel. Alone with this villain on the wide ocean, where no arm of friend could reach to save her, she had saved herself. Still, alas! appearances were against her. He who had professed to adore her, had deserted her—left her to fight her wretched battle alone. The pride of a Cicarini held him back from taking a bride who had—so he thought—been the wife of his courier. At the best, he had given her but a half-hearted affection, which he afterward took back to bestow on that noble lady whom only he had ever really loved.

If Cicarini was proud, Kitty was yet more proud.

She had never attempted explanation or reconciliation, since it had not been asked for. She knew that the lovely duchess had died peacefully in a convent. She knew that the count had been informed of the death of Alberto—for Teresa had confessed that she had sent him a notice of the death.

As for that other devotee at her shrine, poor Philip Armory, Kitty did not give him more than a passing thought—his shadow glided in and out of her memory, and that was all. Philip was young, beautiful, sincere, pure; but his was

not the magic touch at which Kitty's nature would blossom into passion.

If Kitty had had a *home*—sister or brother, mother or father—she would have laughed at Patton Radcliffe's suit. She knew that she did not care for him, except to feel pleasant gratitude for his ceaseless and friendly attentions.

"Oh, I am so lonely!" she said to herself, as she sat there, in her cunning boudoir. "Lilia and Florian seem so happy together. And I—I have no one!" and two silvery tears trickled over from the blue eyes and rolled down her satin cheeks.

"Papa, if I make a mistake—if I choose wrongly and am unhappy—it will be your fault! You have driven your only child from her natural shelter—refused her your love and protection—set her adrift on the sea of life, and, if she goes to wreck, the blame will be all yours. Ah, if I *only* knew how to decide!"

Kitty thrust a tiny blue satin slipper from under her white cashmere morning-dress and stared at that, as if it might give her assistance in coming to a conclusion.

"Why need I be in haste?" her thoughts began to run on again; "I am very young still—a little past eighteen. I shall have lovers—scores of them! Why need I take up with this offer? Mr. Radcliffe is elegant and agreeable; I suppose my money would be a real boon to him—he is poor, he says—and he knows how to care for a woman and make her like to depend on him. All this is far from love, however. It may be, if I wait, I shall see a man that I can love—almost—almost as I loved Carlo."

"Never! I shall never love again."

"Mr. Radcliffe seems more like an elder brother to me."

"I would not be so lonely."

"Nobody would dare to slander poor Kitty if she were married."

"Yet, I do not like to do it."

"Shall I?"

"Oh, what a tiresome world this is!"

Here Kitty yawned—she had been up late the night previous.

Then she arose from the little satin chair—all covered with curious and elaborate needlework of birds and flowers—and paced up and down, with her little white hands clasped tightly behind her.

Rain and sleet, a delectable mixture, were falling out-of-doors.

She could not go shopping, nor attend the matinee, nor make calls.

The weather made her frightfully homesick.

Absolutely there was nothing to do but to go up to her sitting-room and get Eliza to show her the new lace-stitch—but she did not care for lace-work.

An hour to luncheon!

"What a pretty house I have!" she thought, as she went slowly up the velvet-covered stairs. "It would be so cosy—so charming—if!"

She entered the little sitting-room, out of which her bedroom opened—a very cheerful place even on a dark day, with its crimson carpet and wood fire—and rung a bell for Eliza.

The girl came in, with a newspaper in her hand, looking quite white and frightened.

"Have you read the mornin' paper, Miss Kanell?" she asked, eagerly, without waiting for her mistress to speak.

"No, Eliza; the morning papers are stupid—nothing but news—news."

"Sure, an' it's news ye may call it, this time, miss."

"What is it?" asked Kitty, now noticing her servant's excited tones.

"Och, sure, an' my heart aches for the poor young man! To my mind, he was far the best-lookin' of 'em all, Miss Kitty. Such purthy dark eyes an' a forrid like the snow. It's what will his poor mother do that's worryin' me to think of? To think he should have been only the very last night, an' him as handsome as a picture!"

"Whom *are* you speaking of, Eliza?"

"Mr. Philip Armory, sure! They're afraid he is kilt enthirely, goin' home from this very house—the bloody bastes!"

"Mr. Armory—killed!"

Kitty turned very pale and sunk down in a chair.

"Rade it yerself, miss, an' see what the paper says."

With quivering fingers Kitty took the damp sheet, while Eliza pointed out the item:

"BRUTAL ASSAULT AND ROBBERY.—Mr. Philip Armory, confidential clerk in the American Bank, while returning from a party at the house of a young lady on Brooklyn Heights, at about one o'clock last night, was struck by a slung-shot on the temple and felled to the ground, where he lay."

insensible when officer McCarthy reached him on his return. The unknown assassin, or assassins, escaped, with his watch and purse, the latter containing only a small sum. It is conjectured that the robber had reason to suppose that young Armory had a large sum of money on his person, as no other reason for the assault appears. There is no clue to the assassin. Mr. Armory is still unconscious, at the house of the president of the bank, Mr. Kanell, where his mother also resides. He will receive every attention from our most skillful physicians; but little hopes are entertained of his recovery."

For a few moments Kitty remained stunned by this frightful intelligence.

"Oh, what will his mother do?" she soon moaned, bursting into tears. "I ought to go home, Eliza. It is cruel that I cannot go home, when Mrs. Armory is in such trouble! Put on your bonnet, this minute—you can go in the carriage—and get into the house, some way, and find out if Mr. Philip is any better. If you see Mrs. Armory, give her my love, and say that I long to come to her."

When the girl had hurried away, Kitty could not rest. She fluttered from room to room, made restless by a strange awe and terror.

Death is terrible enough to all—but when the young are suddenly brought face to face with the grim reality, the shock is awful.

Sharp twinges of remorse ran through Kitty's grief. How kind Philip had always been to her—how careless and cold she had been in her treatment of him! She almost blamed herself that she had not been able to return his love. For that the girl need not have reproached herself—Love is not a spirit to be summoned, like Ariel, and bid to go hither or thither! His rainbow wings poise and quiver above the soul of whom they will.

But we fear it is true that Kitty had been more neglectful of poor Philip's feelings than was necessary; and for this her conscience now stirred uneasily. Even this last evening, after she had invited him to her house—for she was always scrupulously polite to him about such things—she had tortured him with the display of herself as captor, leading a more favored captive.

Too late—too late, to regret these small matters now!

Was it too late?

She refused luncheon, wandering aimlessly about until Eliza—after what seemed a long absence—returned.

Mr. Armory was conscious at present; but the doctors did not think this favorable condition would continue; there was fever, which must result in delirium, followed by coma. He had asked for pencil and paper and had written a few words which he asked to have sealed up in an envelope by his mother and given to Miss Kanell only in case he did not recover. This Eliza had from the nurse, who had come down for ice, while she was in the kitchen. Mr. Armory had also said that he had not seen the person who assaulted him, and who had approached from behind; that he thought he knew who the person was, and that the object of the man was not robbery, although he had taken the watch to make it appear so. The physicians had forbidden his talking, even that much; the house was to be kept still; there was little to be done but await the result of the injuries.

Kitty burst into passionate sobbing before Eliza had completed the brief account.

"You did not see his mother?"

"Ah, no indeed! They say she is just like a stone—hasn't shed a tear, but goes about like a marble statue took to walking."

This was a long, sad day for Kitty. In the evening Mr. Radcliffe called again; but she refused to see him.

Although she had admitted to her own mind that it was possible she might eventually marry him, yet, he was not the one to whom she could turn naturally in time of trouble.

She had never wronged Philip Armory, and yet she felt guilty about him. Oh, if she could make amends! She almost felt that, to see him well again, she would be willing to accept his love. Even this rich boon, for which he had prayed, could do him no good in this extremity. The cruel blow of the assassin had brought him to that verge, dark and low, from whence only the gloomy river is in sight—love, beauty, passion, joy, are left behind.

She cried and cried unceasingly, as she grieved over the fate which had befallen Philip.

"I must know how he is before I go to bed," she said, to Eliza. "I do not mind the rain—I am going with you to the house. I hardly think my father will refuse to allow me to see Mrs. Armory, under the circumstances."

Wrapping herself in hood and cloak she set out, with her maid, to go to the old home. Some

one was just coming down the steps as she went up them—Mr. Radcliffe, who had come, also, to inquire after the present condition of the young gentleman.

"Is it you, Miss Kanell? He is worse—worse! Unconscious again, they tell me. Great heaven, how horrible!"—he shuddered from head to foot, and hardly seemed to know what he was saying, or how agitated he appeared.

By the light of the street-lamp Kitty saw that his face was pale and haggard, and inwardly wondered that he should be so deeply affected by the fate of the man he had covertly ridiculed. His emotion, added to her own sufferings and the bad news, completely unnerved her. She felt that she would not for the world meet Mrs. Armory that night.

"Mr. Radcliffe," she said, faintly, "since I know that he is worse, I will not go in."

"Allow me to see you home, then," and, as she took his offered arm, she felt it tremble.

Neither of them spoke a word as they went slowly back to Kitty's house, the sleet beating in their faces, until they reached the door, when Radcliffe said that he would call in the morning, and left her without asking to come in.

He had been very pale and nervous when he pressed his suit that morning; and Kitty had attributed it to his deep feeling, as a lover not at all sure of success. Now, she thought to herself, how sympathetic he must be, and she liked him rather better than she had before.

CHAPTER XXV.

DECIDED BY LOT.

"Who fears to put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all."

Of all mad matches never was the like!

—SHAKESPEARE.

"You ought to give me an answer, Kitty. I am of tough fiber, but, really, this suspense is wearing me out. I can neither eat nor sleep nor do anything but fear the worst. For so tender-hearted a creature as you are, I do not see how you can treat me with such malicious cruelty! I hope that you are not like the savages in one thing—torture me all these days only to kill me, at last!"

"You have no business to be so urgent, Mr. Radcliffe. I do not want to make up my mind in haste only to repent at leisure."

"If I was not in such sober earnest I might bear with your trifling—even find pleasure in being on your hook while you played the line; for it is a pleasure even to be tortured by you! but a man so terribly in earnest counts the minutes, not the days. You promised me an answer a week ago. Now, in one week there are seven days, or one hundred and sixty-eight hours, or two thousand and eighty—"

"Spare me your arithmetic, please! It will not add to your charms to learn that you are the lightning calculator," laughed Kitty, looking up teasingly at her suitor—she was in one of her gayest moods, piquant and bewitching as she could be, in marked contrast to the low spirits of the past week.

She had heard, an hour ago, that Mr. Armory was better. For long days and nights the news had alternated between hope and fear; to-day it had been decidedly good, and the bright girl, overflowing with youth and the gladness of living, had thrown off willingly the weight of care which had depressed her.

She felt all the happier from having been sad. She was kindly inclined toward her persevering lover. He certainly had worn an anxious, haggard expression which had touched her feelings. She could see, easily enough, how pale and nervous he had grown. Could his desire to secure a fortune have worried him so? or did he really care for her as he professed? It was sweet to be cared for so much; she was grievously homesick and tired; she would like to have rested her poor little head on some strong shoulder, her lonely, craving heart on some strong love. She had but one great objection to Mr. Radcliffe—just the silly objection that she had not a particle of love for him!

She looked up smilingly into his eager eyes, as she toyed with her fan; the color coming and going in her cheeks.

"I have half a mind," she began and came to a full stop.

"Half a mind to say at last that you will have me, sweet?" he whispered, warmly, bending nearer, with flashing eyes.

He tried to take one of the flower-like little hands, but Kitty drew it away, with a wicked laugh, and concluded:

"To go into a convent for life, Mr. Radcliffe. I can't make up my mind to marry—at least,

not to marry you!—and I am so tired of keeping house by myself. The nuns would be very glad to take me and my money, and I should have a home—" here Kitty suddenly remembered the pale, sweet duchess who had gone into a convent to hide her broken heart; and her gay voice faltered and came to a pause. "He shall not break my heart, too!" she thought, bitterly. "No, rather than have him think that I would marry Mr. Radcliffe to-morrow."

Mr. Radcliffe, for once, was vexed to anger. His nerves had undergone a fearful strain and had reached that point of irritation where he could hardly bear, with seeming equanimity these teasing speeches of Miss Kitty. But, there was great necessity that he should control his temper; and, after the first gleam of fire that showed in his gray eyes, he spoke more gently, sweetly, impressively than ever:

"You never were fashioned after the pattern of nuns. Beauty like yours demands a wide field. How foolish of you to talk about loneliness, when so many good men are wild for the privilege of being your friends. I know only too well that men younger and more attractive than I want me out of the way, that they may try their luck with the charmer; yet none love you as I do. I have said my say; you know how I feel. I have arrived at a state where I can no longer endure doubt—even despair seems better than that. So, I bid you a long farewell, Miss Kanell. I have business which takes me to Washington, and I think it will be best for me to remain there some time."

He turned away and walked toward the door.

It was only a ruse to try if this threat would bring the young lady to her senses; but Kitty did not know that. An overpowering sense of loneliness rushed over her. Mr. Radcliffe had been very kind to her; she hardly knew how to dispense with him as a friend; perhaps she had been cold and suspicious. With a feeling of pain at being deserted and of remorse at being a very ungrateful girl—but without one faintest heart-throb of love, Kitty, with faltering voice, cried out:

"Mr. Radcliffe—stay!"

He whirled about, his pulse bounding high with triumph.

"My sweetest love! My darling Kitty! do you bid me stay?"

He seated himself on an ottoman at her feet and smiled up into her lovely, drooping eyes; he even possessed himself of her hand, which she suffered him to retain for just one minute.

Then she drew it away. The air of proprietorship which had already come over the humble lover did not suit her willful ladyship. Her repentance vanished as quickly as it had come.

"I bid you stay until you receive my commission," she said, with a mischievous smile. "If you are going to Washington I desire to send by you my respects to the President! Now that you have my errand you may go as soon as you like."

"Are you flirting with me, Miss Kanell?"

"I never flirt," haughtily.

"Yes, you do. I beg your pardon for contradicting a lady, but you are trifling with me outrageously. I cannot and will not bear it. Answer me at once—will you or will you not marry me?"

"You know I do not love you, Mr. Radcliffe."

"That will come, when you are my wife. I am eager to run the risk of taking you. Kitty, say yes! Say it now. Let us be married soon. It is best for me—it is best for you. As you say, you are alone. It is not pleasant or proper for a beautiful girl of your age to live alone, except for the protection of servants. As my wife, you would have some one to defend, protect, love, live for you. At the same time, you shall be free—free as air—to be happy in your own way. I am no tyrant. You are young and lovely, gay and admired; you shall go into society all you wish; I only ask to be allowed to act as your *cavalier servente*. I will promise you to be a most indulgent husband, whose greatest pleasure it will be to see you admired and beautiful, 'the observed of all observers,' gay, happy. Dearest, you need me! I will be your friend as well as your husband. I will consult your caprices—your wishes shall be my law. I do not expect a young and fascinating woman to give up any of her triumphs for me. Better be my darling than some younger man's slave. Is not all this true? Better listen to reason and say, 'yes.' Will you, will you?"

He spoke with an almost startling vehemence and passion, like one that would not be denied—to whom denial was despair.

Kitty felt the full force of his arguments.

Since she could never marry the only man she would ever love, why not allow this other man to be to her the friend and protector she sorely needed?

Still, Kitty was not so rash as once. She would at least consult Florian Fenn, and take his advice.

"Yes or no to-day," said the suitor.

"Why need you hurry me so?" she retorted, a little peevishly.

A curious light flickered a moment in the gray eyes. Patton Radcliffe knew what frightful reason he had for haste—for the life of him he could not face those innocent blue eyes, and his own fell and hid that tell-tale devil which came up from his soul.

"You must know that suspense is unbearable torture."

"You will live through it, after all," she laughed. "Well, Mr. Radcliffe, I have refused you over and over again. It is your own fault if you are still in suspense."

"You are going to reverse my sentence to-day?"

"Are you as persevering in all things as in making love?"

"Yes or no, Miss Kanell?"

"You would wait another week, I dare say, if I promised you a positive answer at the end of it."

"No, I would not. Another week would be purgatory," he said, in a low voice that certainly had a touch of real agony in it.

"Well, I will not keep you waiting so long as that then. Perhaps I am cruel; but I have sincerely tried to read my own heart and to decide for the best. Come here to-morrow at ten. I will tell you then, for once and all, whether I will be your wife. I must have a little more time to think of it."

"Why must you take this time?" he asked, suspiciously.

"I desire to consult Mr. Fenn," was her candid answer.

His uneasiness partly vanished; Mr. Fenn was friendly to him, nor had the knowledge which some others had of his real character?

"I trust he will prove my advocate," cheerfully.

"I will tell you to-morrow; and now, Mr. Radcliffe, I will excuse you until ten in the morning."

He took his departure in very good spirits, almost assured of ultimate triumph.

Kitty, left alone, made a determined effort to come to some decision.

That evening she ran into the Fenns to have a confidential talk, and had to wait until late for the opportunity. There were a number of musical people already there, met by appointment, to consult upon a Charity Concert for the benefit of the sufferers by the great Brooklyn theater fire. Miss Kanell was immediately seized upon and made to promise that she would take a leading part in the performance. Her youth and loveliness, her glorious voice, her jewels and incomparable taste in dress, even the bits of gossip afloat about her, made it extremely desirable that her services should be secured. Kitty, with her usual generosity, consented to all they wished, and took a hundred tickets besides. After that was settled, it had to be arranged what she would sing; much other business was transacted; and so it was midnight before the others went away, and she was alone with Lilia and Florian.

"I have remained behind to ask you if I shall accept Mr. Radcliffe," Kitty said, with one of her rippling laughs.

"No," said Lilia.

"Yes," said Florian, who realized more keenly than did his wife the necessity for the young lady's being "settled in life."

Kitty went home and to bed no wiser than as if she had not consulted her friends, since each advocated an opposite side.

The girl slept soundly for all that. Her heart was not sufficiently disturbed to keep her awake. She came down, radiant, to a late breakfast, in a black velvet dress which made her look fairer than ever—she was going out to rehearsal immediately after she had given Mr. Radcliffe his answer, and so had put on a carriage dress for the day.

She looked as cool and composed as a lily as she turned around on the piano-stool when she heard Mr. Radcliffe announced, but she blushed beautifully as she held out her hand to him.

His eyes riveted themselves upon that lovely face.

"Well?" he asked, eagerly, almost in a whisper, "yes or no?"

"To tell the truth, Mr. Radcliffe, I have had no opportunity to make up my mind. I went

over to Mr. Fenn's, as I said, and found them busy about a concert in which they insisted I should take part. That took us until midnight. However, do not frown so, or you will alarm me with fears of your bad temper. I always keep a promise, after I have been beguiled into making one. I will now immediately proceed to make the important decision. It shall be purely a matter of chance. Here, now, are two pieces of silk thread which I have pulled out of the fringe of my overskirt. One is short, the other long. I will arrange them so that you can draw, and we will settle this matter by lot. If you draw the longer, I will not have you—if the shorter, I am to be your wife."

She arranged the two threads in her hand so that their length was concealed, with the two ends peeping out between finger and thumb.

"Draw!" she commanded, looking at him with a maddening laugh in her blue eyes, though her hand evidently trembled.

"I will not. I dare not!" he said, growing pale.

"Then we shall fail to come to a decision."

"You are making a fool of me."

"No. I am in dead earnest."

"Supposing I lose?"

"It must be conclusive."

"Or win?"

"That will be equally so."

He stood staring at the bit of black thread a full minute, biting his lips till the blood came; then, with something that sounded like a muttered oath, he seized one of the threads and drew it out.

It was Kitty's turn to grow pale as she slowly opened her little pink palm and disclosed the remaining thread.

"I have the shorter!" the lover cried.

"Yes!"

"And now you are pledged to become my wife!"

"I suppose so," responded Kitty, with drooping head. "No, do not touch me! I must have time to get used to it."

"Do not ask for too much time," he said, with a triumphant laugh. "I want to take you to Washington with me this winter."

"Why, it is nearly the end of February now." "Well, before Congress adjourns, then. There is nothing in the world to wait for, my sweetest love!"

"Oh, yes there is! There's the concert. I cannot even think about my trousseau until after that takes place. There, there, not a cross word about the concert!—and, positively, unless you wish to make me dislike you, don't offer to kiss me until after we—" here she came to a full stop and looked naughty and obstinate.

"Very well. I agree to the hardest terms, only by that hoping to please you and win your consent to a speedy marriage. I have most pressing business in Washington, yet I cannot make up my mind to go until I can take you along."

"We will talk of that after this affair is off my hands. I am going to rehearsal now. Will you speak to Roy to order the carriage around? And will you go with me?"

Of course he would go with her. He was resolved that the whole world in which they lived should be made speedily aware of the right he had acquired to be in the company of Miss Kanell.

There was but one anxiety now on Patton Radcliffe's mind—that was, to hasten Kitty into marriage, before Philip Armory should be well enough to leave his room—in other words, before he should meet Kitty again and betray what he knew about a certain stolen letter.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRIUMPH AND TEARS.

How is't with me, when ev'ry noise appals me?

—SHAKESPEARE.

Oh, that it were possible,

After long grief and pain,

To feel the arms of my true love

Round me once again! —TENNYSON.

It was the evening of the concert. Kitty was dressed and ready for her carriage. She had come up to her room after an early dinner, to give Eliza plenty of time to do justice to the arrangement of her toilet; and now she was dressed, and had half an hour in which to compose herself and rest. Not that she was likely to be embarrassed at coming out on the platform and singing, after having been in opera nearly a year; yet the thought of appearing before a Brooklyn audience certainly did make her rather nervous. She was glad that Mr. Radcliffe was to come to accompany her to the Academy and back.

After a week of being "engaged" to that gentleman Kitty's feelings had not much changed. She would not allow herself to think of the marriage he persistently urged her to hasten. On the contrary, she strove to drown all thought in the business of the concert, which promised to be a very successful affair, both in the quality of the music offered and in the number of tickets sold. Some one else had followed Miss Kanell's example, and purchased one hundred seats, afterward returning them, all but one, as a present, to be sold over again, as she had done with hers. Not a ticket was to be had on the last day.

As Kitty sat waiting, up in her sitting-room, for Mr. Radcliffe's arrival, her fancy ran idly over many things. She wondered who had purchased the tickets; Lilia had only told her that it was a good-looking young gentleman, who was eager to hear Miss Kitty Kanell sing.

There had been something mysterious in Lilia's manner for several days past, and now that Kitty had time to think of it, she wondered what it could be about. Florian had teased her, too, almost beyond the point of endurance, by pretending that he had an important secret, and then "twitting" her about women's curiosity. All he had told her, at the last, was that a young gentleman had volunteered to sing one song toward the close of the evening—a stranger in the city who chanced to be stopping with friends, and who had a voice which made his offer one to be gladly accepted.

"I hope I am looking my best," murmured Kitty, rising and taking a good long look at herself in the tall mirror in which hovered a vision of beauty—a slender, girlish figure clad in a plain clinging robe of thick white satin, *en train*; a few pale blush roses in the soft masses of crimped and gleamy hair and at the neck, just showing a snowy curve in its frill of point lace, and circled by a single string of pearls. There may have been eyes as blue, lashes as long, cheeks as softly curved and tinted, forms as perfect as were Kitty's; but there was an indescribable *charm* about her which was all her own.

She smiled at her image in the glass.

"You will do very well," she said. "Eliza," to the girl, who had been down-stairs for something and now returned, "how do you think I am looking to-night?"

"Like the very angels, Miss Kitty," said Eliza, quickly, hiding a letter in her pocket as she spoke.

"What is the matter?" asked the young mistress, turning to look at her, for there was something strange in the girl's trembling tones.

"Nothing at all—nothing at all, at all, miss," but Eliza kept her face turned away, for she feared that the lady would see there all too plainly the distress it could not hide. "Oh, mum, I'm sure I hear Mr. Radcliffe's ring at the bell. I'll just peep over the banisters an' see."

In a moment she came back.

"Yes, it was him. And it's high time you were off, Miss Kitty. Stand still till I toss yer cloak over your shoulders."

"Where is my fan, Eliza? Of course Mr. Radcliffe has brought me a bouquet."

"Indade he has—just lovely, the same as them in your hair. Well, now, God bless ye, Miss Kitty, an' may ye sing away all their hearts!"

"Good-night, Eliza. You need not wait up for me. I can take off my things without your help."

"Not you! Sure I shall be up an' waitin', mum."

Patton Radcliffe stood at the foot of the stairs, a bouquet of rarest roses in his hand, his eyes kindling with admiration of this beautiful creature whom he hoped soon to call his own.

Not an hour of peace for him until Kitty was his wife!

Would he be at peace then?

Never mind! he had made his bargain with the Evil One, and it was too late to efface his signature, written in blood.

Too late for remorse! Too late for regret and anguish! All he had left to him were the wages of sin, and these were dazzling enough to shut out the ghastly memory of what he had done. This woman was beautiful and young—he should be proud of her. She was very rich—his debts would be paid; he would live the life he loved best, one of ease, luxury, extravagant self-indulgence. He would escape duns—he would have horses and carriages, a French cook, diamonds, and money to waste at Saratoga.

He kissed Kitty's satin hand as she came down—it was the only privilege she would accord to

him as her *fiancé*, and complimented her on her lovely looks.

Then he led her out to the carriage and helped her in, the horses were off, and Radcliffe, with Kitty by his side, was conscious of but one single feeling—a mad longing for the flight of time. The days, the hours, the moments that were of so little importance to others, were to him whips and stings and the torture of the rack. He had heard that Philip Armory was recovering; and, although relieved of one dreadful cause of mental anguish by this news, the strain in another direction was all the more tense.

He wanted Kitty to be his—surely and irrevocably his—before she met Armory again; yet he did not dare in any way to overurge or hasten her, for fear of losing her entirely.

The anxiety he suffered could not be entirely concealed; she had questioned him more than once about his ill looks.

"What are you thinking about, Mr. Radcliffe? Really, one might as well be without an escort," pouted Kitty, as the carriage neared the Academy. The man started, but made a ready answer to her complaint.

"Of what could I have been thinking, dearest, but of our marriage? To-morrow you must set the day."

The carriage drew up to the walk so that Kitty did not have to reply.

Many a handsome and well-to-do young gentleman envied Patton Radcliffe, that night, as he brought Miss Kanell out on the stage or conducted her off, after each of her songs.

They would no longer have envied him could they have felt as he felt for a single moment. As the evening wore on, however, even his sallow face glowed with the sweet sense that he was about to become master of the glorious beauty, whose very appearance was greeted with a storm of applause.

Flowers rained at Kitty's feet faster than he could gather them up for her. She bewitched the house, until the more enthusiastic hardly realized the extent of their demonstrations of pleasure.

Alberto's training had been severe, and the result was an artistic skill equal to the fresh, exultant voice that sent its silver notes to the extremest portions of the house with an ease, freedom and joy that made it a rapture to listen.

More than once, during the evening, while the other singers were engaged, Kitty had leisure to wonder who the gentleman was who had purchased so many tickets, and also who and what was the wonderful singer who was to favor them with a song near the close of the entertainment.

At last the moment of his *début* arrived; she caught a glimpse, from where she was standing behind one of the scenes, of a form that seemed so familiar to her—as the singer passed from a dressing-room on to the front of the stage—that her very pulse stood still in her veins.

That voice! Yes, it was Carlo Cicarini's voice, singing the immortal song of love and anguish of the prisoner in the tower!—singing it as he had often sung it for her in those far-away, brief, dazzling days—the days of love's young dream!

A flush, a glory of joy ran over Kitty's countenance; to be followed by the gray shadow of despair.

It was Carlo!—perhaps he had come for her! What else could have brought him back to America?

And she had lost him this second time, as before! The man who stood by her, to whom she was pledged, would never free her from the thrall she had so indifferently allowed him to cast about her—chains of flowers changing into iron chains. Oh, if she had only resisted him, and kept herself aloof—had felt strong to bear and scorn, her father's desertion, loneliness, and still kept absolutely true to the one image in her heart! She had never told Patton Radcliffe that she loved him—he knew that she had taken him on sufferance—she had assured him, over and over, that she did not care for him. Yet he would not resign his miserable claim to her. She knew that. There was agony in the glance she gave him where he stood by her side with that calm air of proprietorship.

"What is it, Kitty? Are you ill? Ah, I was afraid you would overexert yourself. What shall I get you?"

"Nothing, nothing. It will pass away."

Pass away! Never, never, poor Kitty, will that pain pass away, unless some great change in the state of your fortunes comes to pass!

Radcliffe knew little or nothing of his *fiancée's*

former relations with the Count Cicarini; nor, indeed, was he aware that the singer was the count; therefore he had no clew to Kitty's pallor and trembling, and supposed her faint from fatigue.

The thrice-repeated rounds of applause which followed the count's singing died away. The next and last thing on the programme was the Willow Song out of Othello, to be rendered by Miss Kitty Kanell.

"I had better go before the audience and make your excuses. You are not fit for any further exertion to-night," urged Radcliffe. "No doubt the gentleman who sung last will be glad to take your place; he probably has something for an *encore* that he can give."

Kitty straightened her drooping figure; the fire came back to her blue eyes, the color surged for an instant through her cheeks.

"No, no, Mr. Radcliffe, let me sing. I am quite sure I shall get through with it. Another thing! do not accompany me onto the stage. I choose to go out alone."

The next moment she had advanced and stood before the crowded audience, loudly testifying its pleasure at her appearance.

But Kitty was only conscious of one among those thousands. Despair was at her heart; she was so deadly pale that all noticed the change.

White as the satin robe she wore, she began her song with trembling lips:

"The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
Sing all a green willow."

"What an actress!" thought many of the listeners. "Why! that girl would be wonderful in tragedy! She can change color and weep at will!"

"Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
Sing willow, willow, willow;
The fresh streams ran by her and murmured her moans,
Sing all a green willow;
Her salt tears fell from her and softened the stones,
Sing willow, willow, willow."

Silver tears dripped fast down Kitty's cheeks as her sweet, sad voice sobbed along the mournful lines, until there was hardly a dry eye in the house. The pathos of her singing and of her looks was too real not to have a power of its own. The drooping head, the beautiful pale face, the accent of despair, had such an effect that a minute's silence followed the conclusion.

Then the house rung and vibrated with a farewell gust of applause.

Kitty's failing strength just served her until she passed behind the curtain, when she fell fainting into Teresa's arms, who stood at the door of her dressing-room, waiting to attend upon her young mistress, as she had always done when Kitty sung in opera. The people behind the scenes thought nothing but that Miss Kanell had overexerted herself. Restoratives were administered and she was led to her carriage, where she lay in Teresa's arms on the back seat while Mr. Radcliffe watched her solicitously from the front.

"Do not come in," Kitty commanded, as they reached her house. "I am going to bed, immediately. I dare say a night's rest will restore me, Mr. Radcliffe. Good-night."

But Kitty knew that a night's rest would not cure her trouble. Nothing but death, she thought, would really cure it.

Eliza was sitting up for her and assisted Teresa to undress their young lady. When she was in bed, Eliza went about softly putting away the satin robe, the jewels and flowers of her mistress.

She had some news which had lain heavily on her all the evening. She had not dared distress Miss Kanell with it before the concert, knowing that it would unfit her for what she had to do.

When Kitty came home so ill she still did not venture to speak.

"I must wait till the mornin'. Then I must let her know. She will be sorry I kept it back; but she's not fit for bad news the night."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A TERRIBLE INTERVIEW.

"The only son of his mother and she a widow."

At last I know thee—and my soul
From all thy arts set free,
Abjures the cold, consummate art
Shrined as a soul in thee!

—GRACE GREENWOOD.

At eight the next morning Eliza brought a cup of strong coffee to Miss Kanell.

"Sure an' ye slept wid your blue eyes wide open, Miss Kitty, by the looks of 'em. P'raps you'd better stay in bed the day."

"No, I must be dressed now, Eliza. I prefer being up to lying here wide-awake. I have not slept at all. Mr. Radcliffe will be here at ten, I dare say," with a weary sigh.

"Sure, you'll be afther drinking yer coffee, Miss Kitty?"

"I don't believe I want it," languidly.

"You must take a few drops of it, if ye please, miss. You are that pale you look as if you'd faint."

So Kitty drank the coffee to pacify Eliza.

"An', now, I've bad news fer you, my dear, darlint Miss Kitty. I couldn't make up my mind to it last night, though it come while you was at dinner. I told the others they must kape silent, till the concert was over, or sure, it would spoil the swate singin'."

"Bad news?"—Kitty's blue eyes opened wide and she caught her breath. She thought of the count, but never of the truth. Did the girl call it bad news because Count Cicarini had come over the seas? She looked at Eliza sorrowfully.

"It is about Mr. Philip—he had what the doctors calls a relapse yesterday."

"Is he *much* worse?" asked Kitty, turning white.

"I hope he is better in one sinse, Miss Kitty," answered the girl, gently. "He died at three o'clock in the afternoon."

"Oh, Eliza! and you let me sing! What will his mother think of that?" and Kitty, sitting down on the side of the bed, burst into tears.

She cried a long time. Now that the man who had loved her so hopelessly was dead, she could see all his noble qualities. It was terrible to her to think she would now never have the power to undo the many little slights she had put upon him. She wept for his poor mother.

"I must go to her now, right away! Dress me as quickly and simply as possible, Eliza. My father will hardly be so cruel as to refuse me permission to see Mrs. Armory."

In the midst of her distress there mingled an unrecognized feeling of relief that she would escape Mr. Radcliffe's morning visit. Since she had seen the count on the stage the night before her feeling for her *fiancé* had been growing into fear and dislike. Her only impulse toward him was to escape him.

Half an hour later Kitty went quietly into her father's house and asked a strange servant to show her to Mrs. Armory's room.

The meeting between the two was harrowing. It awoke anew all the anguish of the mother to see the girl whom her son had loved and loved in vain. It tore Kitty's heart to see the mother in her sorrow, and to feel that she, however blamelessly, had added to her pangs.

"You must come and live with me, Mrs. Armory," she said, at parting. "I will be the best daughter I can to you, so long as we both live."

"Take this home with you and open it in the privacy of your own room," the broken-hearted mother said, in return, giving her that letter of which Kitty had before heard rumors. "It is from him. His last consciousness was of you."

Worn out from her wakeful night and the violence of her emotions, Kitty dragged herself home, where she was forced, by deathly exhaustion, to partake of the luncheon which Teresa had seen to having prepared for her.

After that, giving orders that she was at home to no one, she shut herself up in her room, locked her door, and pale and trembling, broke the seal of Philip's message to her.

Eliza, who was in the bedroom adjoining, heard a scream from her mistress, not long after; but, when she tried to enter the sitting-room she found the key turned, nor would Miss Kanell return any answer to her appeals for admittance.

That she was not very ill the frightened girl understood, since she heard the slow, dragging footsteps going up and down in the room all the remainder of the afternoon.

It was twilight when Miss Kanell finally opened her door and called her maid.

"Bring my black velvet dress—it is the only black dress I have. There! who was that came in just now?"

She asked the question almost wildly, and was so changed and ill and nervous that Eliza was seriously uneasy.

"It is Mr. Radcliffe, miss. He is waiting in the drawing-room for you to come down. He's been here this is the third time to-day. I think he feels worried about your health."

"You think so?" repeated Kitty, with a ghostly smile. "Well, I will see him as soon as I am ready. Twist up my hair, anyway. Stay, first tell Roy to light all the lights in the drawing-room and to say to Mr. Radcliffe that I will be down soon."

Eliza gave the order, came back and dressed her mistress.

"I don't like to see you so pale and strange, Miss Kitty."

"Am I strange?"

"You don't seem like Miss Kitty at all. I'm sure Mr. Radcliffe will notice it."

That person was waiting, impatiently, in the brightly-lighted room below. He, too, was nervous and ill at ease. It had been a trying day to him. The news of Philip Armory's death had reached him at breakfast and ruined his appetite. Fierce pangs of terror and joy had mingled in his brain.

It had disquieted him still more not to have been able to see Miss Kanell all day. In her bright presence, he had an idea, he should be happier. He made a desperate effort to look on the sunny side of things—to get comfort from his assured good fortune. But, out of Kitty's presence, he was sorely troubled with a horrible, haunting sense of the unreality of his expectations.

Hearing a light step on the stair Mr. Radcliffe came to a pause in his promenade, standing quite still in the middle of the gay room, when a slender figure, clad in black velvet, with strangely-burning large blue eyes and colorless face, swept up before him, stopped, and stood looking at him.

What was there in the fixed gaze of so gentle a woman as Kitty, to make a hardened man of the world like Mr. Radcliffe falter and drop his own eyes to the floor?

"Kitty, my dear, have you been ill?" he stammered, trying to take one of the small hands clasped lightly together before her.

"Do not touch me," she said, in a tone that made him recoil and turn whiter than she was who confronted him.

"What is the matter?" he managed to ask, with an effort to rally, though he knew well enough, by some intuition, that all was over between him and this lovely lady whose burning gaze was slowly gorgonizing him.

"There is nothing the matter but what your own conscience will inform you of. I wish to speak as few words to you as possible. Give me that letter of mine which you robbed me of."

His visions of ease and luxury faded out of Patton Radcliffe's mind. Still, he would make an effort to defend himself.

"I have it not. I never read a line of it, Miss Kanell, believe me! I put it in the fire. Was it such a heinous crime, for a man, mad with love and jealousy, to appropriate a letter from one he feared might prove a rival? The carrier had just gone down the steps as I went up them; he had dropped it carelessly, and it lay there, asking me to take it up. I put it in my pocket, meaning to tease you about it, and then—that—that fellow saw me have it, I suppose, and told you."

"That—that fellow," said Kitty, slowly, her blazing eyes fixed full on his, "that you followed out of my house, dogging his footsteps like the dastard you were, until you came to a convenient place, and then crept up to, coward-fashion, and—*mu. dered.*"

The man she confronted shrunk back and shuddered.

"My God! do not call it that," he cried, in a hollow voice. "A blow struck in passion is not a murder. Do not speak that horrible word!" Then, the instinct of self-preservation urged him on to another effort. "Who says I struck Philip Armory? It was some thieving rascal, after the bank's money. All the world knows that! Why, I was here, by your side, at the moment when he must have been waylaid."

"You were not. I remember my surprise at the haste with which you made your adieux that night. However, I do not propose either to talk to you or listen to you. You owe it to a no doubt mistaken compassion which I feel for you that the officers are not here in waiting for you, sir."

With a slight motion of her queenly hand toward the door she turned away from the man she might have been persuaded into marrying—the man who, in the eager contest for that now scornful hand, had flung aside truth, honor and manhood, committed a fearful crime, ruined himself for this world and the next.

He stood for a moment unable to move; then his lips formed the words:

"Does any one else know of this?"

She refused to answer him, and with one miserable, defeated, lingering glance at the beautiful, pale girl, he moved slowly to the door and disappeared from her sight.

"I pity him," murmured Kitty to herself. "I pity him even while the very thought of him hor-

rifies me. I know it is my duty to send for the police and have him arrested, before he has time to make his escape, but—I cannot do it. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' Poor, guilty, wretched, stricken creature! Can I fasten the rope about his neck? No, no, no! I would rather pray for him. I will bury this frightful secret in my own breast, where, unless some accident of others brings it to light, it shall sleep forever."

Patton Radcliffe could not know of this merciful resolution of the girl who had just driven him from her with looks that were like the flaming swords of the cherubim guarding paradise.

A wild fear of arrest and punishment—of the prison and the gallows—drove out the bitter sense of disappointment and urged him on to flight. He had that day borrowed money from a comrade, to be repaid after his marriage—this money was in his pocket or he would not even have had the means to carry out his hasty plan, which was—to take the evening train to Philadelphia, and go on board a steamer there, under an assumed name, and sail for Europe.

He was able to carry out his plans for the simple reason that Miss Kanell did not betray him to the law; and in one of the gambling resorts of Italy he found refuge and employment congenial to his tastes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFTER A DARK DAY.

"The old love still is the true love."

"My dearest dear little dear."

"I AM so sorry he burned the letter," Kitty thought, with a passionate longing to know if it was from the count, and what it had contained. "Ah! if I only knew! Will I ever know? The count is in this country; he saw me last night, yet he does not come near me. I dare say I am mistaken in what I inferred, last evening, that he had come over the sea to learn something of the Kitty Kanell in whose fortunes he was once interested. Doubtless he scorns her many faults—looks down upon her from the vast heights of his superiority! Very well. The question then remains—what does Kitty Kanell think of the count? He was the ideal of her childish fancy—is he still the ideal of her woman's heart?"

"If I met him now would I think of him as I did in those early days? Perhaps, all this time, I have been worshipping a shadow which at sight of the substance would vanish into air. Perhaps, a meeting with Carlo would be the means of destroying the illusions with which I have invested him. I wish I were not so pale—and what dark hollows there are about my eyes!" the girl murmured, stopping in her uneasy flitting from room to room to look at herself in one of the mirrors of her Japanese boudoir. "I betray that I have seen Banquo's ghost. Alas! poor Philip! why should I have been your bane when you loved me so?" and she pressed her hands over her lids to keep back the tears—of which she had already shed too many that day—and turning from the glass soliloquized: "Love! it is a fearful gift, after all, to bestow on another! I pray that no one will ever offer me the gift again. I tremble at myself and my own power."

"Power! Need I think that I wield the magic wand of beauty when I cannot beckon to me the only man I care for—or ever will care for? What is this? A card," lifting it from the table where it lay and eagerly reading it. "The count! Then he came—and I did not know it. He will be offended with me. Oh, what an unfortunate girl I am! Yes, I told Eliza that I could see no one to-day."

Her ear caught the sound of gay voices in the hall—Lilia's and Florian's. These good friends of hers had left her alone that day, not because they supposed Mr. Armory's death would affect her deeply, but because they thought she would need rest after the fatigue and illness of the concert.

Roy threw open the door and they came in with the pleasant bustle and freedom of intimate friends. Behind them came another.

Kitty's blue eyes were riveted upon the third person. For the life of her she could not move or speak.

"Ha, Kitty, you have teased me enough to know what my mystery was," laughed Florian. "I could not keep it any longer. Do not you remember the count? Ha, ha, ha! Quite like old times! Here we are, all together again! Lily, dear, I'll wager a dollar you wish we were back to those days of our courtship—come, now, confess it! Kitty, this is awfully jolly, isn't

it?"—he rubbed his hands together and laughed, as he rattled on in a manner very convenient for covering Kitty's speechless condition.

"I trust you are as glad to see me as our mutual friend would like to make out," said the count, advancing, and then Kitty laid a little cold hand in the palm of his and their eyes met.

"Are we strangers? Must we make our acquaintance over again?" he asked.

"I do not know. It is all so strange," answered Kitty.

It seemed as if he could not tear his eyes from her face. Kitty did not know it; but she was looking even lovelier than on the stage of the Academy the night before. Her pallor, the shadows under her eyes, imparted a pathetic charm to her young face.

"Excuse us a moment," said Lilia, tucking her hand under Kitty's arm and drawing her away from the other two into the boudoir. "Kitty, I have not told him one word about Mr. Radcliffe. I could not endure to, when I found that he had crossed the water to resume his acquaintance with you. He says that he wrote to you about a month before he left Venice, but received no answer. He was sadly jealous of Mr. Radcliffe last evening. For mercy's sake, Kitty, tell me that you have not yet promised that gentleman to marry him!"

"Mr. Radcliffe knows that I do not like him," and she shivered as she said it. "I have given him his *congé*, Lilia—he will never persecute me with his attentions again."

"Then I congratulate you, my fair countess," with a sly laugh.

Kitty blushed.

"Come back in the drawing-room, now, before that lovely color fades; and remember, Florian and I have an engagement to go and see mamma this evening, so you will have to excuse us in a few minutes."

Diplomatic Mrs. Fenn was as good as her word; very shortly she spoke of an engagement and forced her husband away, he declaring all the time that he had rather remain where he was.

"They seem very happy," remarked the count, when they were gone.

"They are very happy."

"Will you sing something for me, Miss—Kitty?"

She did not like to refuse, and yet she dreaded the ordeal. It would be more embarrassing not to sing; so she went at once to the piano, and he came and stood by her, in the very attitude in which he had been standing that night of Lilia's party when she had so eagerly asked her friend to point out the count. Poor child! every fiber of her being was thrilling, her heart was beating with suffocating rapidity; yet she mastered her trembling voice and sung through, bravely, a ballad which she remembered as a favorite of his.

While she sung he watched her gravely. When she had finished he did not ask for another song, but said "Thank you," and still stood there looking at her with searching eyes. Kitty, now that she had mastered her first emotion, was not afraid of those eyes. She had nothing to conceal from him. Her own true blue eyes could allow themselves to be searched to their depths.

"Did you get my letter?"

"I did not, Count Cicarini."

"Well, I wrote to you. It was after a long interview which I held with Isola, Alberto's wife. She told me a great deal about you, which she gained from your servant, Teresa, I believe. I could not refuse to listen to a story which so deeply interested me. By means of it I became aware that I had done you a great injustice. I wrote to you, to beg your pardon."

"Yes?" faltered Kitty, not with as much pride as she could have wished.

"You knew that I had loved, unhappily, before I met you?"

"I knew it. The duchess herself told me her sad story, while she was in this country. She came out to the convent to see me."

"She died of a broken heart—" his voice trembled.

"I pitied her," said Kitty, gently.

"I mourned for her, long and faithfully," he went on, solemnly.

After a pause he resumed in a different tone:

"The feeling that I had for you was different from the love I bore her. I met you after I had conquered a passion which I then felt to be hopeless. It was wrong to love her. I had been ill and homesick and sad; and your youth, your fresh beauty, your joyous spirits, had an unspeakable charm for me. I longed to have such a companion. Perhaps it was not such love as I ought to have given in return for your

first affection. When I heard that Laura was free, and loved me still, my heart went back to her. Fate had ordained that we were never more to meet.

"In the mean time a singular misfortune had overtaken you. Naturally, I believed that you had stooped to a low alliance. Could I have thought otherwise? Yet I never ceased to wonder at it—to feel a deep interest in your happiness.

"Kitty, Kitty, what is the use of idle explanations? I have come to you because I could not stay away. Have I lost my long journey?—must I go back as I came?—or—Kitty, after all, I am quite certain that you and I were made for each other!"

He leaned toward her, a tender smile in his deep eyes.

The care and weariness of two years rolled away from Kitty's spirit; even the miserable tragedy of the day just past was forgotten.

"I am glad that you think so, Carlo, for I have known it from the first."

"Then you love me still?"

She turned her dazzling face to him for an answer.

"You are the same little angel that you used to be, dear Kitty!"

"I never was an angel—only a foolish butterfly, with too much wings. Yet I will try hard to become angelic, for your sake, Carlo. You must take me, faults and all, however."

"If I can have you as you are, I shall be the happiest man in the world."

He carried her little white hand to his lips.

"It is pledged to me now; I can kiss it if I like. Kitty, I cannot remain very long in America. It is very good of me to give you a month in which to get ready to go back with me."

"Have I got to go back with you? I did not think of that!"

"Are you sorry?"

"I would rather have remained here."

"You shall return whenever you like, Kitty. I am willing to compromise."

"Say a year of New York after a year of Venice?"

"If you wish it."

"Then we will keep this pretty house just as it is; and we will come back here and show people how happy we are. Really, though, it is presumptuous in you, Carlo, to expect me to get ready to be married in one short month."

"Who was that gentleman so attentive to you last evening?"

"Jealous, already! He wanted me, or my money, it matters not which. I have refused him and he will never speak to me again."

She shuddered and a cloud passed over her bright face.

"I shall be so glad to have some one to take care of me," she continued, wearily. "I have been quite alone, Carlo."

"Poor child," caressingly, "you never again shall be alone, while I live. Your father must be made of sterner stuff than most men, to have treated you as he has."

"It will not matter so much now," she whispered, for he had drawn her head down to his bosom and she was at peace.

The congratulations of the Fenns were sufficiently cordial, to make Kitty feel that she had some true friends.

But the person who betrayed the most delight at the news of the coming wedding was Eliza.

"Sure an' i's all turned out as I hoped it would, Miss Kitty. 'Twill be the blessedest day o' my life that I dress you in the wedding dress an' the good minister makes a countess of my darlint." Then, suddenly and anxiously—"I'm to go along?"

"Yes, Eliza; you shall be my maid until you want to get married yourself, some fine day. You have been a too true friend to me not to share my fortunes. Why, Eliza, if you had not beamed me to the party, that night, I might never have met my count!"

"Thru for you, Miss Kitty."

"What a lark that was! I shall not dare to do such things when I have the dignity of the Cicarini coronet to support."

"I thrust ye'll remain the same sweet lady that you've always been, Miss Kitty. I dare to say, ye're good enough for them Chickareys, or anybuddy else in this livin' world!"

"That's your opinion, Eliza. However, the count has no near relatives to kill me with criticism."

"They'd better not try it," said Eliza, defiantly.

In consideration of the circumstances in which Miss Kanell was placed, it was arranged that

the wedding should be private, with only the Fenns as witnesses.

But there was a house full of flowers, as much as if Kitty's "dear five hundred" admirers were all to come; and there was a feast, and the bride wore a magnificent dress and veil, so that Eliza had the privilege of making her as beautiful as possible, and we dare affirm that not a countess of the long line whose counterparts looked down from the walls of the Cicarini palace, ever was or could have been lovelier, purer, or more graciously sweet and womanly than this latest Countess Cicarini, nee Kitty Kanell.

It was in the early spring-time that Kitty was married and sailed away with her husband for the sunny Mediterranean sea. Italy welcomed the happy bride with her smile of immortal beauty. Nothing delighted Carlo more than to take his wife to the ruined temples, the vineyards, and mountains, and leafy vales, and interesting cities of his native land—and it chanced, upon one of their visits to Monaco, by the sapphire sea, that Kitty stood in a hotel vestibule, eye to eye with Patton Radcliffe, one of the most desperate gamblers of the place. He gazed upon her in her perfect beauty as if too fascinated to tear his eyes from her; then, urged by a fear from which he was never at any time entirely free, turned and slipped away. Probably he left Monaco for a time; though his once friend never thought of denouncing him. It was the only clew Kitty ever had to his whereabouts or fate; and that was more than she cared for.

When Kitty asked Carlo to bring her home for a few months to her house in Brooklyn, next door to her old friends, the Fenns, she was both surprised and glad to learn that her father had recently married Mrs. Armory. The two lonely ones had wisely concluded to "halve their sorrows and double their joys."

"Now," said Kitty, gayly, "I'm positive she will induce papa to make up with his naughty child!"—and so she did.

Mr. Kanell had been long, long ashamed of his harshness to his only daughter; but pride stood in the way of his making concessions, until his wife afforded him the opportunity for doing so gracefully.

Philip sleeps tranquilly under the weight of his costly tomb; the flowers of summer and the snows of winter come and go unheeded by him, while a guilty man is wandering somewhere in the world seeking to hide the brand of Cain upon his brow.

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